



AL AMANA CENTRE

MUSCAT, SULTANATE OF OMAN

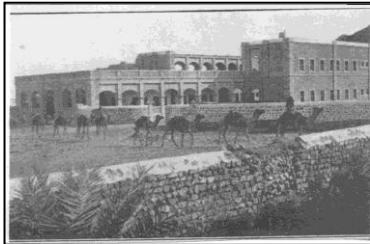
H A N D B O O K



OUR HISTORY – A UNIQUE LEGACY

The name “Al Amana” is Arabic for “bearing trust,” which captures the spirit and legacy of over 115 years of service in Oman. The Centre is the child of the Gulf-wide mission of the Reformed Church in America that began in Oman in 1893. The mission’s first efforts were in educational work by establishing a school in 1896 that eventually became a coeducational student body of 160 students. The school was closed in 1987 after ninety years of service to the community.

The mission was active in many other endeavors, which included beginning a general hospital (the first in Oman), a maternity hospital, a unit for contagious diseases, and a bookshop. With the growth of these initiatives, by the 1950’s the mission was the largest employer in the private sector in Oman. In the 1970’s the hospitals were incorporated in the Ministry of Health, and the mission staff worked for the government to assist in the development of its healthcare infrastructure.



The mission also established centers for Christian worship in Muscat and Muttrah. It is out of these centers that the contemporary church presence for the expatriate community Oman has grown, now occupying four campuses donated by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.



After Oman discovered oil, having a newfound wealth with which to modernize, the mission's activities were either concluded or grew into independent initiatives. However, the desire to serve the people of Oman continued. It was then decided to use the mission's rich legacy to establish an ecumenical center that works internationally to build bridges of understanding and cooperation between Christians and Muslims to work for the common good.

AL AMANA CENTRE (AAC)



The AAC works internationally to foster understanding, acceptance, trust and peace between Christians and Muslims. To accomplish this, the Centre:

- **Provides** opportunities for Christians and Muslims to interact at the level of friendship and faith, and provides a place to discuss issues of mutual concern.
- **Develops** courses and programs to help Christians understand and appreciate Arab culture and religion, and cooperates with Muslim leaders to support their educational

initiatives on religious coexistence.

- **Pursues** opportunities for service that contribute to the common good of the communities in which we live.

OUR PROGRAMS

Transparent in manner, international and ecumenical in outlook, the Centre offers itself as a place where relationships can be cultivated between people and communities of diverse backgrounds. It encourages dialogue between people of faith on cultural and spiritual matters.

The programs at the Centre are organized around the following:

- **Exchange Programs** that offer educational experiences for international guests from the East and the West to learn about each other's faith, values, practices, and culture. The Centre hosts university and divinity school students from the West who come to Oman for a short-term experience. Our goal is to help students shed false stereotypes and develop an understanding and appreciation for Arab culture, Islam and the dynamics of Christian-Muslim relations.
- **Scholars-in-Residence** have a home and assistance at the Centre while pursuing their research interests in religious or Middle Eastern studies. The Centre also arranges opportunities for a scholar-in-residence to offer his or her expertise to the local community. Oman provides an excellent environment for scholarly pursuits. The Ministry of Religious Affairs hosts an annual lecture series with leading scholars in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, and it started the journal *Al Tasamoh* (Tolerance), which has become an important avenue for scholarly contribution. The Grand Mufti of Oman has a leading role in the International Association of Muslim Scholars, which has, within its purview, dialogue with other religions and cultures. Oman's current initiatives and history of tolerance make it a significant place for research and scholarly contribution. Visiting scholars that have been hosted are inspired by the environment.
- **Courses & Conferences** are organized for the ecumenical and interfaith community to help build bridges of understanding, trust, and cooperation so that we discover new ways to work together for the common good.

- **The Ecumenical Council for Charity (ECC)** represents over 115 years of charitable work in Oman by the Al Amana Centre. Through the ECC, support is raised to assist low income expatriate workers facing problems that are beyond their resources. This support is extended to individuals regardless of religious affiliation. For some, a death in the family or health problems can lead to grave financial difficulties. This is where the ECC steps in to help support them so that they have the resources to make it through the crisis. Since 2001, the ECC has helped close to 1,500 individuals and families directly, and supports a free medical clinic established through the Ministry of Health. This is in addition to numerous other cases which have been directed to resources that they did not know were available to them.

FACILITIES AT THE CENTRE

There is a desk top computer in the “reading area” and a wireless hub for guests to check email - no password required, and access is readily available. However, VOIP technology is not permitted in the Sultanate of Oman, and you may find sites like Skype, Vonage, etc., blocked.

There is a washing machine and a dryer that may be used for laundry, as well as a fridge, microwave oven and stove with utensils, crockery and cutlery. In addition, there is a First Aid Box in the kitchen where you will find basic medication. The fuse box is located at the far end of the dining area.

CONTACT NUMBERS ARE THE CENTRE

- Office - 24715472
- Director – 99454172
- Director of Admin. – 99366823
- Res. Manager – 95227663

OTHER IMPORTANT NUMBERS

- Emergencies – 9999
- Directory Enquiry – 24600100
- Flight Information – 24519223
- Medical Emergency – Muscat Private Hospital – 24583790 / 24583600
- General Medical Needs - Dr. Hussain - 24566435
- Dental – Harub Dental Clinic - 24563814
- U.S. Embassy – 24643400
- British Embassy – 24609000
- Dutch Embassy – 24603706

DONATIONS

We appreciate the many friends of Al Amana who through their financial contributions make our programs possible. Through their generous support we are able to reduce our costs to make participation possible for our students. If you would like to support our programs, donations can be made in one of the following ways:

a) Directly to the AAC Account:

Bank: Bank Dhofar

Location: Muscat Branch (Branch Code 25), Sultanate of Oman

Swift Code: BDOFOMRU

Account Name: Al Amana Centre

Account No.: 01/411/260116/00

b) Through the Reformed Church in America:

Information to make a donation can be found at www.rca.org. Under “Missions” at the top of the page, click on “Middle East”; at the bottom of the page under “Opportunities to Donate,” click on “Make a Donation” next to Al Amana Centre.

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



The Sultanate of Oman is located in the farthest southeast of the Arabian Peninsula. Its western borders are with the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, while the Republic of Yemen lies on its south-western border. The Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea is on its eastern and south-eastern coasts.

The inhabitants of Oman have long prospered on Indian Ocean trade that led to strong relations with East Africa, India and China. At one time Oman was a maritime empire, which at its peak in the 19th century stretched down the East African coast and vied with Portugal and Britain for influence in the Gulf and Indian Ocean. In the late 18th century, a newly established Sultanate in Muscat signed a series of friendship treaties with Britain and other countries. Over time, Oman's dependence on British political and military advisors increased, but it never became a British colony.

In years gone by, Oman was rich with copper and frankincense, and enjoyed an extensive East African trade. The present ruler, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Saïd, assumed the throne in 1970, and that date now marks the beginning of the widely celebrated renaissance in which the country has been returned to an age of prosperity and progress. Oman's moderate, independent foreign policy has sought to maintain good relations with all Middle Eastern countries.

What makes Oman's renaissance unique in the region is that the transformation has been conducted with great sensitivity towards traditional values. Traditional architecture remains with few high-rise buildings in the capital. The country has a heritage of forts, which number over 2,000 and have been meticulously restored. Ancient crafts like weaving and pottery are actively supported. Moreover, traditional Arabian values, such as hospitality and practical piety, are still in evidence making Oman somewhere to experience Islamic culture at its best.

Area:	212,460 sq km (82,031 sq miles)
Capital:	Muscat
Population	2,900,000 (est.), of which nearly 30% are expatriates
Form of Government:	Monarchy with Consultative Council
Major Industries:	Petroleum, Shipping Ports, Manufacturing, Tourism, Aluminum Smelting, Construction, Agriculture and Fisheries
Currency:	1 Rial Omani = \$2.6008 (384.5 Baisas of one Rial Omani = 1 US\$); Rial is pegged to US Dollar
Ethnic groups:	Arab, Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi), African
Religions:	Omani – Muslim (65% Ibadi, 33% Sunni, 2% Shi'a), and a small but prominent community of Hindus. Expatriate – Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Zoroastrian, etc.
Languages:	Arabic (official), Swahili, English, Baluchi, Urdu, and a variety of Indian languages.

CLIMATE

The country's climate is predominantly arid and varies slightly from one region to another. In the coastal areas, the weather is hot and humid during the summer months, while it is dry in the interior. Milder weather dominates the mountains and southern region year round. Winter temperatures can be as low as 15°C (59 F) and summer temperatures can be as high as 48° C (118 F) in Muscat and as high as 54° (129 F) in the desert. Dhofar, located in the southern region of the country, enjoys a regular monsoon between June and October every year.

Average Temperature in Oman

	Summer				Winter			
	Day		Night		Day		Night	
Muscat	43.0 C	109.4 F	32.0 C	89.6 F	25.0 C	77.0 F	17.0 C	62.6 F
Salalah	30.0 C	86.0 F	28.0 C	82.4 F	28.0 C	82.4 F	20.0 C	68.0 F

Best Time to visit - The best time of the year to visit Oman is between October and April, when the weather is pleasantly warm in the day and cool in the evening. Temperature averages at 25-35 C (77 – 95 F) during the day and dips to 17-19 C (62 – 66 F) at night.

RECOMMENDED READING

Oman

- “Oman – Country Profile” by the Oxford Business Group
[http:// www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com](http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com)
- J.E. Peterson, “Oman: Three and a Half Decades of Change & Development,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol 11, No. 2 (Summer 2004), pp. 125-137. This article, as well as many other items of interest, can be found at: <http://www.jepeterson.net>

Islam in General, and Islam in Oman

- Reza Aslan, *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (Random House, 2006)
- Dale F. Eickelman, “Oman,” “Ahmed Ubaydli,” “Ibadiyah,” and “Ibadi Dynasty,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Oxford University Press, 1995)
- Carl W. Ernst, *Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004)

Christianity in the Middle East

- Betty Jane Bailey & J. Martin Bailey, *Who are the Christians in the Middle East?* (Eerdmans, 2003)
- Lewis R. Scudder III, *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son* (Eerdmans, 1998)

FINANCE

Banking Hours: 8:00 am to 2:00 pm (Sunday - Thursday)

Banks around the Centre: Oman Arab Bank, Oman International Bank, National Bank of Oman

Exchanges around the Centre: Purshottam Kanji Exchange

- **ATM Machines** - ATM machines are the easiest way to access cash and are easily located, with one within walking distance of the Centre. The exchange rate issued through ATM machines is generally quite favorable to the dollar. Be aware, though, that cards issued by small local banks may not work in the Middle East. Check with your bank to find out exactly how your debit card might work overseas. (What is the transaction fee? What is the daily limit for withdrawals? What networks does it have access to?) Also, be sure that you have a four-digit PIN number that works overseas.
- **Credit Cards** - American Express, Visa or MasterCard credit cards are very useful for purchases while traveling. If you are a student, the card **MUST** be in your name, not your parents'. Credit cards are widely accepted in larger shops and restaurants, but cash is more acceptable in smaller outlets. Ask your credit card company how to report a loss of your card from abroad. 800 numbers generally do not work overseas, but your company should have a number that you can call while traveling internationally.

Other Tips for Managing Funds Overseas

Do change some dollars into Omani Rials either from an exchange or a bank. Banks charge a higher rate, so money exchanges are a better option for changing cash money. The Centre can assist you with this.

Never carry large sums of cash with you or leave it in an unsecured place. Manage your finances during your time in Oman with ATM cards, petty cash, and credit cards. Funds should be organized into separate areas. Always leave some currency and a credit card at the residence in a secure place as a back up. A money belt is helpful to carry money, credit cards, and passport. However, avoid reaching into the money belt in public places.

HEALTH

Since 1970, the improvement of health care and hygienic conditions has been a priority for the government. As a result, health conditions in Muscat are on par with anywhere in the world. Even the smallest restaurant usually maintains reasonably high standards of cleanliness. Medical treatment is of western standards. No special vaccinations are needed, and malaria, endemic only 30 years ago, is no longer a problem in the cities and most of the country.

Medication can be obtained easily at a local pharmacy. Students with chronic medical problems for which they routinely take an antibiotic should at least know the name of the antibiotic when they arrive in Oman. The physician can generally call in the prescription as long as the student knows the name of the antibiotic. Students who take regular prescriptions should talk with their doctor before traveling to the Middle East and if possible, take enough medication to last the whole time while abroad.

The Al Rimah Medical Centre (24700515 / 99327164 – Emergencies) in Greater Muttrah is a ten minute drive from the Centre and is reasonably well equipped to deal with emergencies. Hatat Polyclinic (24563641) in Wadi Adai is slightly further away, but also has all the necessary facilities.

Medical Bills - Should a guest be hospitalized or require out-patient medical care, he or she should be prepared to pay by credit card or cash. All payments must be made when services are rendered. Guests are advised to obtain receipts in order to be reimbursed by U.S. insurance companies. Companies usually require itemized receipts.

Insurance – Guests are required to have international medical insurance to cover hospitalization and other expenses. For students, this can be through the parent's family-plan insurance, coverage offered by his or her home school, or short-term insurance offered by a provider that specializes in coverage for students studying abroad. It is advised that students and their parents inform themselves thoroughly about the extent of their benefits and the conditions for collecting them from their insurance companies. Students' international medical insurance coverage must meet or exceed the minimal standards cited.

Medical History Report - Guests must complete the Medical History Report included in the document packet. The itinerary followed while in Oman requires good health, both physical and mental. In some cases, mild disorders can become serious under the stresses of life abroad. Therefore, Al Amana Centre reserves the right to cancel a guest's acceptance if, after receiving the Medical History Report, there is cause to believe that the candidate is unsuitable for a trip abroad. Failure to submit a completed and signed Medical History Report or failure to give accurate health data on the Medical History Report is grounds for rejection from the program or dismissal if disclosure occurs after the program has begun.

Dental Service – There are a number of reputable, English-speaking dentists in Muscat. The same procedures apply regarding bills and insurance claims for dental services as those for health services mentioned above.

Medication/Items to Have Available

- Antiseptic Cream
- Aspirin, Tylenol, etc.
- Extra eye-glasses, prescriptions, contact lenses, contact solution
- Feminine Products
- Ear plugs & "swimmer ear" prevention drops
- Insect Repellent
- Sunscreen (at least 25-30 SPF)

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- **Photocopies of Important Documents** - Before leaving for Oman, make two copies of all your important documents (passport, bank card, credit cards, traveler's checks, and travel itinerary). Keep these in a safe place, leaving one copy at home in the U.S. When you don't need your passport, carry the copy.
- **Be Inconspicuous** - It is important for guests not to draw unnecessary attention. Guests should learn some basic phrases in Arabic. Avoid wearing shirts and accessories that carry overt political messages.

TELEPHONES

For those making international calls to Oman, the country code is 968. For those making international calls from Oman, dial 00 + country code + phone number. In the event of an emergency, incoming international calls can be received and local calls made from the AAC office telephone (24715472). A cell phone with a pre-paid card will also be made available. There is a public phone booth within walking distance of the Centre. Pre-paid phone cards are available from supermarkets and smaller shops for RO 2, 3 and 5.

ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES

The electric current at the Center is 220V; therefore, students will need converters for their electrical equipment. Since electricity is 50 cycles A.C., electrical equipment with motors will not work properly and will burn out. Therefore electric shavers and hairdryers may still not function properly and it is best to have items designed for this currency. Because of the different style of plugs, an inexpensive plug adapter is needed (Oman uses a 3-pin flat blade British-style plug).

CLOTHES

There are many tailoring shops around town. Clothes can be specially made at very reasonable prices-- RO 4 for trousers, shirts, blouses and skirts, RO 8 for dresses and RO 10 - 15 for a jacket. They are at their best when copying something you have given them. There are many material stores around. Ask your tailor the amount of material needed. Costs vary from one Rial a meter to RO 10 or more. A pair of trousers would need a little over one meter of material, a jacket about four meters.

Cheap footwear can be found in the above mentioned supermarkets. There are also shoe shops in the main streets of Seeb and Ruwi, including Shoe City. There are better quality shoes shops in the Al Khamis, Wadi, and Sabco Centres in Qurm, amongst other locations.

SPORTING GOODS

There are several good quality (and expensive) specialist shops, for example, in the Zakher shopping centre in Al Khuwair, and the Capital Commercial Centre and Sabco area in Qurm. There is a branch of Muscat Sports in Seeb as well as Ruwi and Qurm.

Although camping gear can be bought in supermarkets such as the Sultan Centre (Qurm) and Carrefour (Seeb), the items here are rather expensive. A much better place to buy is Haji Dawood Salmin (24712647/ 24703295 / 24697828) at Muttrah Corniche just to the right of the “Fish Souq” roundabout, and in Ruwi.

GROCERIES & PROVISIONS

There are some small stores around the Muttrah area. Nearby, in Darsait, is the Lulu Hypermarket that sells a variety of items, including food, clothes, etc.

Heading towards Qurm, next to the Al Harthy Centre, is the Sultan Shopping Centre, which has a great selection of items, including Western products. Carrefour, which is comparable to Wal-Mart, is opening a new outlet in Qurm, and there is an outlet in the City Centre Mall (Seeb). There are several Al Fair supermarkets in Qurm, Medinat Qaboos, and Shatti Al Qurm that carry delicacies unavailable elsewhere.

GENERAL SHOPPING

All the shopping malls are fully air-conditioned, brightly lit, cleaned round the clock, and have their own mix of shops and showrooms, car parks, cafes and food courts, and play areas for children. In Qurm, the best places are Al Aرامي, Al Harthy, Sabco Centre, Capital Commercial Centre and Al Khamis complexes. Heading past the airport, there is the City Centre Mall and Markaz Al Bahja, which are ‘super malls’ with food courts, entertainment and a vast array of shops stocking international brands, e.g., Mango, Marks & Spencer’s, Woolworths, Zara, etc.

BOOKSHOPS

The newly opened Borders outlet at City Centre Mall has a wide selection of books and has the added advantage of a Starbucks inside the store. Besides this, the Family Bookshops in Madinat Qaboos and Qurm, and the Turtles Bookshop at the Airport and Jawaharat Al Shati Plaza are good places to look for reading material. Christian literature is available at the Bible Society outlets in the Church compounds in Ruwi and Ghala (Tel 24799474). The best place for second-hand books is the House of Prose in the Wadi Commercial Centre (Qurm) (Tel 24564356). If books are returned in good condition, 50% of the price is refunded. However, most of the books are fiction.

TRAVEL AGENTS

There are a large number of agents in Muscat. Well known for its service and cheap prices is Marmul Travel (Tel 24602868). Other travel agents include United Travel (Tel 24703303), Meزون (Tel 24796680), Bahwan (Tel 24704455), and National Travel and Tourism (Tel 24566046).

PHOTOGRAPHY

While photography is permitted throughout the Sultanate and there is beautiful scenery everywhere, photography of government and embassy buildings, and military installations is not permitted. Likewise photographers should be very circumspect when it comes to photographing Omanis, especially women. It is not advisable to take pictures of others without first asking. This can be done by saying *Mumkin sura, min fadlak?* (May I take your picture please?)

ALCOHOL

The sale of alcohol to expatriates for consumption at home is controlled through a licensing system. Muslims are not permitted to purchase alcohol in this manner. However, anyone is permitted to purchase alcohol at one of the restaurants or pubs. Great care must be taken not to cause offence through the use or abuse of alcohol. The police take a very serious view of traffic offenses in which alcohol is involved. The drinking age is 21 in Oman. All students must follow the alcohol policies of their respective schools when staying at the Centre.

TRANSPORT

Roads in Oman can be compared to the best anywhere in the world. The condition of the asphalt is excellent, traffic lanes are well defined, signals, driving regulations and guidelines clearly posted at regular intervals. Motorways link Muscat with all major cities and towns in Oman. There are excellent roads leading to Dubai. An international driving license is valid in Oman. American and British licenses are valid when renting a car.

Vehicles are driven on the right side of the road. It is essential to carry vehicle documentation and driving licenses, and it is mandatory to call the police for any accident however slight it may be. Driving under the influence of alcohol is a serious offence and is strictly prohibited.

Buses

Oman National Transport Corporation (ONTC) offers regular bus service to Salalah, Nizwa, Sohar and Dubai, among other destinations. Fares and schedules may be obtained from ONTC at 24590046.

Taxis

Taxis are orange and white. If you want to save money on taxi fare, you must know the difference between hiring an “engaged” or “not engaged” taxi. As a foreigner it will often be assumed you want an engaged taxi which means you will taken directly to where you ask and no other passengers will be picked up. This is convenient but far more costly.

A non-engaged taxi is one that already has a set destination or direction. The van taxis (known as “baisa buses”) are all non-engaged. People will get in and out of these as the taxi goes along its route. It is simply a matter of finding a taxi that is going the direction you want. Because of this, it is helpful to know the name of the roundabout near your destination or maybe some other well-known land mark. Instructions are given by landmarks, not streets, in Oman.

There is a taxi stand around the corner from the Centre where there are frequently taxis going to Ruwi. At the roundabout west of the Muttrah Souq there are taxis going to Ruwi at almost all times. This route also goes by the Lulu Hypermarket in Darsait, which is a good place to shop for groceries and other household items.

In Ruwi there are non-engaged taxis going to many different areas. The disadvantage to a non-engaged taxi is that you might have to walk a little because the taxi will only follow its route and doesn’t drop you at your destination. You’ll be dropped on a main street near your destination.

It is always a good idea to establish the price at the beginning of the taxi ride. The prices of non-engaged taxi rides rarely change, but when in an engaged taxi the price is determined by the driver. It is not uncommon for a driver to try and charge more for tourist so prepare to bargain for a better price.

One can also use a “call taxi.” You should call at least one hour in advance, more on weekend evenings, so that it arrives at the time you desire.

Taxi prices are approximately:

Non-engaged

Muttrah to Darsait	100 baisa
Muttrah to Ruwi	200 baisa
Ruwi to Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque	400 baisa
Ruwi to Airport	600 baisa
Ruwi to Sidab	200 baisa

Engaged

Muttrah to Airport	RO 8 - 10
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Call Taxis

City Taxi (for 24hrs) Phone: 24602211, 24603363

Bid Bid Taxi Phone: 24693377

Al Dar Taxi LLC. Phone: 24700555/24700777

Vehicle Assistance

AAA (Arabian Automobile Alliance) - Ph: 24697800

Provides 24 hour roadside assistance (mechanical repairs, towing service, battery boosting, fixing flat tyres, lock out service, emergency fuel service) 365 days a year.

Car Hire**Al Maha Rent-a-car**

PO Box: 582, Postal Code 117, Madinat Al Alam

Tel: 24603376, 24603359

Fax: 24605502

Email: mahaa@omantel.net.om

Avis Rent-a-car

PO Box: 833, Postal Code 112, Ruwi

Tel: 24706526

Fax: 24794980

Email: avisoman@omantel.net.om

Budget Rent-a-Car Travel and Allied Services LLC

PO Box: 889, Postal Code 113, Muscat

Tel: 24704244, 24794721/23

Fax: 24798144 GSM: 99427386

E-mail: budgetom@omantel.net.om

Europcar Oman

PO Box 3275, Postal Code 112, Ruwi

Tel: 24700190, 24700191

Fax: 24794061

E Mail: eurmct@gto.net.om

Rates: Between RO 10 - RO 15 per day, depending on vehicle. 4WD are from RO 35 per day. Rates are lower if rented by week or month, and there are low season discounts on request.

Insurance: RO 3 per day excl. PAI.

VISAS

Semester Program - Students coming to Oman for the semester program will have special visas arranged by the Centre for their stay.

Short Term Visitors

Single Entry Visit Visa – This visa is available to nationals from Europe, North and South America, and a few other designated countries, upon arrival at all land, sea and air terminals. The relevant visa application form should be completed upon arrival, and a fee of the equivalent of RO 6 (\$ 15) will be charged. The applicant's passport should be valid for not less than six months, and the validity period for the visa is one month. This type of visa may also be obtained from Oman diplomatic missions and commercial representation offices.

Extension Term and Procedures: One month for the same fee. The extension application should be presented to the Directorate General of Passport & Residency. A fine of RO 10 (US\$ 25) per day is charged for overstaying the visa expiration date.

Multiple Entry Visa – This visa is available to nationals from Europe, North and South America, and a few other designated countries, at all land, sea and air terminals. The relevant visa application form should be completed upon arrival, and a fee of the equivalent of RO 10 (US\$ 25) will be charged. The applicant's passport should be valid for not less than one year, and the validity period for the visa is one year. This type of visa allows its holder to stay in Oman for three weeks on each visit during the validity period of the visa. A minimum of three weeks must elapse between each visit. This type of visa may also be obtained from Oman diplomatic missions and commercial representation offices. This type of visa cannot be extended. A fine of RO 10 (US\$ 25) per day is charged for overstaying the visa expiration date.

Common Visa Facility with the Emirate of Dubai – Nationals from Europe, North and South America, and other designated countries, arriving from the Emirate of Dubai to Oman and have an entrance visa from Dubai are not required to obtain a separate visa for Oman. The visa for Dubai is recognized for entry to Oman by land, air or sea terminals regardless of the sex or age after completing the designated forms available at the airports and sea port and at Hatta Hotel for those arriving through Al Wajaja terminal. The bearer of the visa is allowed to stay for the period of the visa issued to him in Dubai. No fees are charged, and are only paid to the relevant authorities in Dubai.

Customs Regulations - Travelers entering Oman may not carry with them or in accompanied baggage any firearms, narcotics, ammunition, or pornography; all are subject to seizure if found. Unaccompanied baggage and household goods are also subject to inspection. Books, videotapes, and audiotapes may be reviewed prior to being released to the owner. When shipping items to Oman, a copy of the packing list is required to clear effects through customs. Certain plant materials and food items can be subject to inspection at the quarantine office located in the airport. Personal effects are exempt from duty.

CHURCHES & WORSHIP TIMINGS

The Protestant Church in Oman

Tel: 24702372 / 24799475

The Protestant Church in Oman (PCO) is a diverse and embracing community of Christians. The PCO also sponsors forty other congregations with different languages and styles of worship.

The PCO in the Capital area offers three English worship services in Muscat every week as follows:

Friday – 9:00 am – Bosch Hall, Ghala

Friday, 11:00 am – Good Shepherd Hall, Ghala

Sunday, 7:30 pm – Main Hall, Ruwi

There are also English services on Friday mornings in Sohar and Salalah and an Arabic service at Zwemer Hall in Ghala on Thursdays at 7:00 pm.

Oman Marthoma Church

Sunday, 7:30 – 9:30 pm, Ruwi (Malayalam)

Mar Gregorios Orthodox Church

Wednesday, 7:30 – 9:00 pm – PCO Good Shepherd Hall, Ghala (Malayalam)

Church of South India

Friday, 6:00 – 7:15 pm – PCO Main Hall, Ruwi (Malayalam)

Catholic

Church of Saints Peter & Paul – Ruwi

Tel: 24701893

Monday – Thursday – 6:15 am

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday – 7:15 pm

Thursday, 7:00 pm, 8:15 pm

Friday – 7:30 am, 9:00 am, 10:30 am, 5:30 pm, 7:15 pm

Sunday – 6:00 am, 5:30 pm, 7:15 pm

Holy Spirit Catholic Church – Ghala

Tel: 24590373

Thursday, 7:15 pm

All other services the same as above.

WORKING HOURS

Ministries & Government Establishments - 7:30 am to 2:30 pm (Saturday to Wednesday, week-end is Thursday and Friday)

Private Sector Companies - 8:00 am to 1:00 pm; 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm (Saturday to Wednesday)

Banks – See under Finance.

Ramadan Timings - Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, is the ninth month on the Arabic calendar which is a lunar calendar. Every year Ramadan shifts back eleven days on the western solar calendar. Restaurants (except in hotels) and other eateries are closed during daylight hours during the Holy Ramadan period. Eating, drinking, or smoking outside during daylight hours is considered offensive and should not be done.

Shopping Hours - 8:00 am to 1:00 pm, 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm. The *souq* shops open around 9:30 a.m., close from 1:00 – 4:00 pm, and reopen until 9:30 pm. Department stores, supermarkets and shopping complexes are open from 9 am to 10 pm every day with the exception of Friday, when they open between 2 – 5 pm, During Ramadan, some shops may not open until after *Iftaar* (when the fast is broken in the evening).

TIME

Greenwich Mean Time plus 4 hours. There is no Daylight Saving Time.

DATES

A simple but important thing to know is that dates are printed day/month/year and not month/day/year as in the U.S.

MAIL

There is a post office box service only, and there is no home delivery. Mail for the Centre is collected from the allotted mailbox. Mail can be sent to you in care of Al Amana Centre, PO Box 11, Muscat 100, Oman.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Oman is a Muslim country and it is important that as guests in the country you respect the local customs. Expatriates should be aware of what is acceptable and what is not. For example, shoes are removed before entering a house. The soles of the feet should be turned away from others at the gathering.

Greetings

Omanis offer a very warm welcome to their guests. Traditional Arab greetings are still widely observed and it is good manners to exchange greetings and handshakes when meeting locals. A few words of Arabic helps enormously to break the ice. These courtesies should be observed when shopping and in personal interchanges. Do not be offended if a man or woman refuses a hand shake, especially with a person of the opposite sex. With a woman, it is best to wait for her to offer her hand. If someone does not want to shake hands, usually the person will bow his or her head politely with the hand on the chest. Just acknowledge with a smile and do the same. Muslims prepare for prayers five times per day and may not wish to shake hands after prayer preparation.

Ramadhan

The holy month of Ramadhan is the month when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. It is also a time of piety, tolerance, patience and good will. As a matter of courtesy, guests must show consideration for those who are fasting during Ramadhan. Although as non-Muslims we are not expected to fast, we must remember not to eat, drink or smoke in public. At all times we must be careful about how we dress in public, but this applies particularly during Ramadhan.

Dress

The simplest rule for women to follow is to cover shoulders and knees. Avoid figure-hugging t-shirts and leggings. Loose trousers, capris, or blue jeans are fine. Any top worn should come past the waist of your trousers. Women should not wear strapless sundresses, miniskirts, shorts, or low-necked dresses in public places, i.e., *souqs*, shopping area and parks. Beach wear should only be worn at the beach or pool areas.

Men should wear short or long sleeved shirts and long trousers in public. Again, shorts and beachwear should only be worn at the beach or pool area.

When camping, cargo shorts (to the knees) and t-shirts are permissible for males and females. Special care should be taken to be appropriately dressed during Ramadhan and also when exploring the interior, irrespective of the time of year. You will undoubtedly see people ignoring the dress code, and Omanis, being very gracious, will not say anything. However, never take silence as acceptance!

OTHER INTERESTING SNIPPETS

Beverages - Arabic coffee (*qahwa*) is served black and is wonderfully spiced with cardamom. The small cup will be refilled and it is customary to drink at least two cups. When you've had enough, rotate the cup side to side quickly with your wrist. Some families prefer to entertain their men-folk while the women meet together separately. The atmosphere is always relaxed and friendly. In some of the five star hotels, you will find areas where Arabic coffee and dates are served.

Frankincense - In the surrounding countryside of Salalah in the south, on the flanks of the mountains, grow the *Boswellia sacra* better known for the sap it produces: frankincense. Frankincense, of course, is best known to Christians as one of the gifts of the Magi in the nativity story. In all probability the frankincense that was a gift to the baby Jesus came from Oman as the *Boswellia sacra* tree grows nowhere else.

The Falaj System – Water from the mountains is tapped by an underground drainage system that has been dug from small shafts. From this source, the water is channeled to the village. The main stream is used for domestic purposes before it branches off into the agricultural area. According to legend, the origin of Oman's ancient water-distribution system, the *falaj* (pl. *aflaj*) can be traced back to the time of Suleiman bin Da'ud (Solomon, son of David). While flying on his daily journey from Persepolis to Jerusalem, King Solomon was blown off course by a strong wind. When he looked down, he saw a splendid castle in the landscape of Oman and sent his agents to investigate. They reported that an eagle lived there, always had, and that the only inhabitants of the land were Bedouin. King Solomon then commanded his agents to dig for water in the mountains to produce water channels (*aflaj*), a thousand a day, and he stayed for ten days. There is a remnant of a *falaj* along the front wall of the Al Amana Centre.

Arabic Script – The Arabic alphabet is the script used for languages such as Arabic, Kurdish, Persian, Urdu, and others. Arabic is written from right to left, and is written in a cursive style of script. There are 28 basic letters in the Arabic alphabet.

SURVIVAL ARABIC

ARABIC NUMBERS

0 – <i>sifr</i>	11 – <i>bidaashar</i>
1 – <i>maaHid</i>	12 - <i>ithnaashar</i>
2 – <i>ithnayn</i>	13 - <i>thalataashar</i>
3 – <i>thalaatha</i>	14 - <i>arabataashar</i>
4 – <i>arbaa</i>	15 - <i>khamaashaashar</i>
5 – <i>khamsa</i>	16 - <i>sittaashar</i>
6 – <i>sitta</i>	17 - <i>sabataashar</i>
7 – <i>sabaa</i>	18 - <i>thamantaashar</i>
8 – <i>thamaaniya</i>	19 - <i>tissataashar</i>
9 – <i>tissa</i>	20 - <i>ashreen</i>
10 – <i>aashara</i>	

DAYS OF THE WEEK

Saturday –	<i>yom as-sabt</i>
Sunday –	<i>yom al-aaHad</i>
Monday –	<i>yom al-itbnayn</i>
Tuesday –	<i>yom ath-thalaatha</i>
Wednesday –	<i>yom al-arbaa</i>
Thursday –	<i>yom al-khamees</i>
Friday –	<i>yom al-jumaa</i>

USEFUL ARABIC WORDS / PHRASES

Good morning	<i>sabaaH alkhayr</i>
Good morning (response)	<i>sabaaH annoor</i>
Good evening	<i>missaa alkhayr</i>
Good evening (response)	<i>missaa annoor</i>
Hello (literally “Peace be upon you”)	<i>assalaam alay-kum</i> (response – <i>waalaykum salaam</i>)
Hello	<i>marHaba</i> (response – <i>marHabtayn</i>)
Goodbye	<i>ma salaama</i>
How are you? (m.s.)	<i>kayf Haal-ak?</i> (<i>Haal-kum</i> – plural)
How are you? (f.s.)	<i>kayf Haal-ik?</i>
Fine, thank God	<i>zayn, alHamdu lillah</i> or <i>bikhayr</i>
Yes	<i>naam</i> or <i>aiwa</i>
No	<i>La</i>
Thanks	<i>Shukran</i>
You’re welcome	<i>Afwan</i>
Please	<i>min fadlak</i>
How much?	<i>bikam?</i> or <i>kam?</i>
Where?	<i>wayn?</i>
My name is...	<i>ismee...</i>

RESTAURANTS

Muscat has some excellent restaurants and eating out is one of the main forms of socialization. Some of the restaurants, particularly in the five star hotels, are of international standard. The restaurants geared towards locals also have a family room, which one can use if there are ladies among the group. Some options available are:

- Omani - Bin Atique Restaurant in Ruwi (24702727) and Al Khuwair (24478225)
- Turkish – Turkish House Restaurant in Al Khuwair (24488071) serves particularly good fish and Arabic starters, and is a reasonable option
- Chinese / Thai – Golden Oryx in Ruwi (24702266) and Golden Dragon (24697374) in Madinat Qaboos
- Japanese – Tokyo Taro at the Al Falaj Hotel in Ruwi, the Sheraton Resort in Shatti (24605945)
- Arabic - Automatic Restaurant (24487200) in Qurm, and Kargeen (24692269) in Madinat Qaboos
- Mexican – Pavo Real in Madinat Qaboos (24602603)

- Italian – O Sole Mio in Shatti Al Qurm (24601343)
- Indian – Mumtaz Mahal (24605907), Omar Al Khayyam (Tel 24707082)
- Of course, if you're feeling particularly nostalgic, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Hardees, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Nandoos (a South African chain) and other international chains offer take away and restaurant dining. Pizza Hut (24817715) offers home delivery in the Muttrah area.
- If you wish to go more up-market, there are excellent restaurants at the finer hotels. The Grand Hyatt, Crowne Plaza, Al Bustan Palace Hotel, Sheraton, Chedi, Shangri La Bar Al Jissa, etc., offer some excellent dining options.

TIPPING

A general rule of thumb is 10% at local restaurants, and 15% at more established restaurants. Hotel restaurants usually add an additional 17% tax, including service, to the bill.

SOME FAVORITE ARABIC RECIPES

Hommus

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups chickpeas, soaked overnight or one can
- Water
- 2 tsp salt
- Approx 2 cloves garlic
- ¾ cup *Tabini* (sesame seed paste)
- Approx ½ cup lemon juice
- Pinch cayenne pepper and 2 tablespoons chopped parsley to garnish
- 1 tbsp Olive oil

Drain the soaked chickpeas, place in a pot and add three times their amount of water. Add 1 teaspoon salt and bring to the boil. Boil vigorously for about 10 minutes, turn the heat down, cover the saucepan and simmer until the chickpeas are very soft- approx 1 hour. Drain liquid off and reserve. Reserve ½ cup of the whole, cooked chickpeas for garnish. Purée the remainder of the chickpeas by pressing through a sieve or placing in a blender. Crush the garlic with the remaining teaspoon of salt. Beat or blend it into the purée. Slowly beat in the *Tabini* and lemon juice alternately. Blend in a little of the reserved liquid to make the mixture a thick creamy consistency. Adjust salt and lemon to taste. Serve on a platter garnished with a pinch of cayenne pepper, parsley and the reserved chickpeas.

Babaganush

Ingredients:

- 1 large eggplant (about 1 pound)
- 1 glove garlic, minced
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus more for garnish

- 2 tablespoons *Tahini*
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice

Directions:

Preheat oven to 450 degrees F. Prick eggplant with a fork and place on a cookie sheet lined with foil. Bake the eggplant until it is soft inside, about 20 minutes. Alternatively, grill the eggplant over a gas grill, rotating it around until the skin is completely charred, about 10 minutes. Let the eggplant cool. Cut the eggplant in half lengthwise, drain off the liquid, and scoop the pulp into a food processor. Process the eggplant until smooth and transfer to a medium bowl.

On a cutting board, work garlic and 1/4 teaspoon salt together with the flat side of a knife, until it forms a paste. Add the garlic-salt mixture to the eggplant. Stir in the parsley, tahini, and lemon juice. Season with more salt, to taste. Garnish with additional parsley.

Tabouleh

Tabouleh is a salad like no other. Made with fresh veggies, olive oil and spices, it can be eaten in pita bread, scooped onto pita bread, or traditionally with a fork. Tabouleh can be made with a variety of veggies according to taste. You can add carrots, cucumbers, red or green onions. You can also add romaine lettuce for a fuller salad.

Ingredients:

- 2 bunches of fresh parsley (1 1/2 cup chopped, with stems discarded)
- 2 tablespoons of fresh mint, chopped
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 6 medium tomatoes, diced
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 cup *bulghur* (broken wheat), medium grade
- 6 tablespoons lemon juice
- 6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Romaine lettuce or grape leaves to line serving bowl (optional)

Preparation:

Soak *bulghur* in water for 1 1/2 to 2 hours in cold water until soft. Squeeze out excess water from *bulghur*, using hands or paper towel. Combine all ingredients, except salt, pepper, lemon juice and olive oil. Line serving bowl with romaine lettuce and add salad. Sprinkle olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper on top. Serve immediately or chill in refrigerator for two hours before serving.

LEISURE

During January and early February, there is the Muscat Festival. Events, exhibitions, and performances are spread throughout the city. It gives one a good opportunity to get a bird's eye view of Oman and its people.

Oman offers more daylight opportunities than nightlife. One of the main attractions of staying in Oman is the great outdoors. Below are some of the many things one can do:

Outdoor Activities

Oman's diverse terrain of mountains, deserts, and seascapes are an outdoor enthusiast's dream comes true. What follows are just some of the adventures available. To see the full arrange of options or to book an outing, go to www.desert-discovery.com, www.gulfleisure.com, www.desertthunderoman.com, www.bluzonediving.com, or www.diveoman.com.om.

- **Scuba Diving**

Oman has a varied coastline over 1600 km long. There is a wealth of underwater flora, marine life and diving thrills awaiting the underwater explorer. Several companies specializing in diving services offer a complete range of diving courses, diving equipment and activities (night dives, wreck dives, etc.)

- **Rock Climbing**

Rugged mountains rising to 3,000 meters offer an amazing adventure amidst a maze of spurs, wadis (gorges), deep canyons and towering cliffs. Getting onto the mountain in a four-wheel drive is easy. For the rock climber, every mountain face presents an enigmatic challenge.

- **Camping**



Oman's landscape offers some exciting opportunities for full-scale adventure, from breathtaking deserts to rugged mountains, serene beaches and tranquil wadis. Oman is a camper's paradise with a variety of settings to offer. Whether you provide your own gear or rely on one of the specialty tour operators, you will find many a placid moment to relax and reflect on your voyage through a heretofore hidden world. Most areas are open to the public, but some unique locations, such as Turtle Beach and the Saiq Plateau, require permits from the government. Check with a local tour operator to see if

permits are required.

- **Desert Safaris** - Offered by most tour operators, this is an authentic camp-out-in-the-desert that no one should miss. Facilities generally include sleeping out in Barsti huts, Omani BBQ under the stars and a morning full of gritty dune bashing, camel riding and visiting the Bedouins.

- **Splelunking (Caving)** - The limestone rich sedimentary deposits of Oman's mountains provide the backdrop for those who seek to find the inner path. There are caves to suit all adventurer's tastes from simple to complex. Oman is now recognized as home of the world's second largest cave: the stunning *Majlis Al Jinn* (Meeting place of the Spirits). Checking in at over 4,000,000 cubic meters, and located in a remote region of the Eastern Hajar Mountains, Majlis Al Jinn is big enough to house five of the Al Bustan Palace Hotel. However, cavers be prepared. The entrance to the cave is a 160



meter free descent. This adventure is only available through a tour operator. Do not try this on your own! Other caves of interest are Al Hoti/Falahi Cave near Al Hamra, Moqul cave in Wadi Bani Khalid, Three Windows Cave System in the Eastern Hajars, and the largely unexplored Tiq Cave in Salalah.

- **Camel Racing**

Camel racing is an exciting sport where camels, their owners, and many spectators congregate at racetracks around the country. The camels that are bred for the track are highly prized possessions. A good racing camel can fetch a price of RO 30,000 (US \$ 77,400). Jockeys are drafted for their size (or lack thereof) and some make their professional debuts around five years old. Crowd enthusiasm is high on these occasions. However, race day is not announced long in advance, so it is best to know someone who has an inside track as to when a race is scheduled.

- **Turtle Watching**



The beaches of Ras Al Had, Ras Al Jinz and Masirah island are just some of the areas where several species of marine turtles come to lay their eggs. Green turtles, Loggerheads, Hawksbill and Leatherbacks live for over 100 years and swim the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean only to return every year to the same sites to lay their eggs. Many tour operators and hotels in Sur offer turtle visitation packages. It is necessary to acquire a permit to visit the official nesting sites as the turtles are protected as endangered species.

- **Dolphin Watching**

Oman offers protected waters that are teeming with marine life, mainly seen by the local people who work and live here. You can see whales and dolphins all along the Oman coastline from the north to south. Twenty-one different species of whales and dolphins have been identified along the coast of Oman. One can see dolphins generally all year round, but for whales the sightings are better from October to May.

- **Snorkeling**

You can snorkel in pristine waters surrounded by majestic mountains. The sheltered bays offer a safe environment for snorkelers and non-divers to explore. Marine life in the Gulf of Oman is rich in diversity with fish, corals, turtles and invertebrates.

- **Beaches** - Oman is lined with some stunning beaches. With over 1600 km (1000 miles) of coastline, much of it accessible, there is just about any activity the average beachgoer can find from sunning, swimming, diving, snorkeling, boating, surfing, sail boarding, beach combing and shell collecting. In the Muscat area, several major hotels are on beach front property. Just off the suburb of Shatti al Qurm is 'The Intercon Beach' facing the Muscat Intercontinental Hotel. This beach is ideal for family outings, morning walks or a jog in evening. It is not uncommon to find local Omanis playing pick-up games of football (soccer) in the breakers at low tide. You will find restaurants, snack bars and cafes along the beach as well as local dive operators. The Intercon beach extends two km to the Crowne Plaza hotel. At the Qurm beach entrance, barbecuing is allowed on the beach. You might find local youth singing in groups late into the evening.

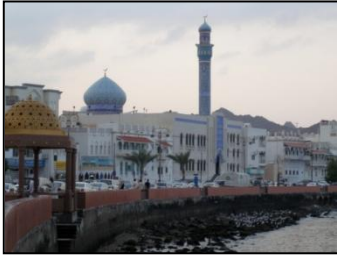
Indoor Activities

- **Bowling** – The Oman Bowling Centre in Al Khuwair, opposite the Muscat Holiday Inn (24480747) has a ten lane bowling alley; charges are RO 1.500 / per game.
- **Ice Skating** – There is an ice skating rink in Al Khuwair (24489492) that is open from 9:00 am to 10 pm and charges RO 2.500 per session.

- **Health Clubs** – The Al Falaj Hotel (24702311), within ten minutes driving distance from the AAC, has a well equipped gym. Temporary membership is available at RO 80 for three months.
- **Music Groups** - Muscat Singers meet every Saturday night from 7.30pm - 9.30pm at The British School in the Main Hall. Katherine Cole - Conductor – 95233805; Philip Brierley - Chairman - 99330604

MAJOR CITIES

- **Muscat**



Muscat, the capital city of Oman, lies sparkling white, topped with golden minarets in the middle of a maze of brown pleated mountains reaching down to the Arabian Sea. Described as "Arabia's jewel," the city is a blend of the old and the new. Muscat is green as green can be, and defies being classified as part of a desert country. The roads are lined with well-manicured lawns and trees. During winter this is interspersed with a profusion of multi-colored flowers. While modernizing, it has steadfastly retained its old-world character. Old

Muscat has a quaint charm about it with many forts, castles, mosques and towers dotting the landscape. Of particular note are the Jalali and Mirani forts flanking Al Alam Palace. The Corniche, with its promenade and *souqs* (markets) is one of the highlights of the city. The old *souq* of Muttrah is an ideal spot for tourists to buy keepsakes and treasures. Greater Muscat boasts high-rise business properties (but not too high), world-class highways, upscale suburbs rooted in traditional Islamic architecture, elegant mosques, large green parks, archaeological sites, museums and world-class hotels. It is no wonder that Muscat is increasingly becoming an attractive tourist destination among the world's travel going public.

- **Sur**

Distance from Muscat: 335 km (via interior paved road) or 240 km (via coastal road, mostly paved). Average drive time: 4 hrs by paved road: 3.5 hrs by coastal road. One can get there by bus through the Oman National Tourist Corporation (ONTC – Tel: 24590046). Saloon cars and 4-wheel drives can be hired from car rental agencies (See Car Hire – Page 13).

Sur, a serene sea coast town with its striking traditional dwellings is a pleasant getaway and one of the most important towns in the Eastern region. The drive from Muscat via the interior cuts through wadis and passes through the Hajar Mountains. An alternate route down the coast through the village of Quriyat is adventurous and offers fabulous views of sparkling white beaches covered with multi-colored shells, deep ravines, cliffs that fall dangerously into azure seas, rocks sculpted by wind and waves, and lush green oases. The journey ends in the city famed for its dhow shipyards--and presumed home of the legendary Sinbad the Sailor. A trip through Sur's labyrinth of streets reveals many fine old houses with carved doors and arabesque windows. From the corniche, the dhows in the harbor can be seen against the scenic backdrop of the Gulf of Oman.

- **Nizwa**

Distance from Muscat - 174 km. Average drive time - 2 hours. One can get there by bus through the Oman National Tourist Corporation (ONTC). Cars can be hired from Car rental agencies.

Nizwa, the verdant oasis city with its blend of the modern and the ancient was the capital of Oman during the 6th and 7th century. One of the oldest cities of the Sultanate, this was once a center of religion, education, and crafts. Nizwa has been an important crossroads at the base of the Western Hajar Mountains connecting Muscat, Buraimi, and the lower reaches of Dhofar. The Falaj Daris of Nizwa is the largest single *falaj* in Oman and provides the surrounding country side with much needed water for the plantations.

The city, famous for its historical monuments, handicrafts and agricultural products, has an expansive *souq* showcasing a wonderful array of handicrafts, coffee pots, swords, leather goods, silverware, antiques, and household utensils. Nizwa fort, completed in the 1650's, was the seat of power during the rule of the Ya'rubia dynasty and is Oman's most visited national monument. The reconstructed Sultan Qaboos Mosque is one of the renowned mosques in the country, representing a former seat of learning. In the evenings, the call of the muezzin fills the air calling the faithful to prayer.

A few kilometers from Nizwa lies the mysterious town of Bahla. Bahla is the home of myths and legends that have carried through the centuries. Some people today still believe that magic is afoot in Bahla and many Omanis are superstitious when it comes to talking about Bahla. This little town is famous for its pottery. The old Bahla fort, with its 12 km wall, is the oldest fort in Oman. The fort is believed to have been built in pre-Islamic times and is now undergoing reconstruction sponsored by UNESCO. The site is included on UNESCO's list of World Heritage monuments. A short distance beyond Bahla lies the Castle of Jabreen. This massive three-storied fortress was also built during the Ya'rubia dynasty of the mid 1600's. It is a fine example of Islamic architecture with beautiful wooden inscriptions and paintings on the ceilings. Other interesting locales between Nizwa and Bahla are the 400-year-old village of Al Hamra and the mountainside village of Misfat Al Abreen.

- **Sohar**

Distance from Muscat - 230 km. Average drive time - 2 hours. One can get there by bus through the Oman National Tourist Corporation (ONTC). Cars can be hired from Car rental agencies.



Sohar, a seaside city, was the capital of Oman many centuries ago and legend has it that it was named after the great grandson of Noah (of the Biblical flood). Originally known as Magan (Persian-Mazoun), the city's name alludes from early ship building activity. The word "magan" means ship's skeleton or chassis stemmed from its copper deposits in the mountains of Majan.

Sohar belongs to the fertile Batinah coast region, and is arguably the most verdant city in Oman. The drive to Sohar along the coastal highway passes through thick plantations of dates, mangoes,

limes, bananas, vegetables and fodder crops. The Sohar Fort, built around the 1st century AD, is one of the major landmarks of this city. Built on a hilltop, this fort has five impressive towers and is the only Omani fort that is whitewashed.

- **Ibra**

Distance from Muscat - 150 km. Average drive time - 1.5 hours. One can get there by bus through the Oman National Tourist Corporation (ONTC). Cars can be hired from car rental agencies.

The Gateway to the Eastern region of Oman, Ibra was famous for its fine horses and horsemen. A unique feature of Ibra is the "Wednesday Souq" run entirely by women. On the far side of Ibra lies Al Mansfah village, a community of mansions once owned by prosperous merchants of the 19th century during the reign of Said the Great. With the decline of Said's commercial empire, these once stately mansions fell into ruin.

- **Salalah**

Distance from Muscat - 1030 km. Average drive time - 12 hours, 1 hour by flight. One can get there by bus through the Oman National Tourist Corporation (ONTC). Cars can be hired from Car rental agencies. Oman Air operates regular flights from Muscat to Salalah.

Nestled in the southern region of Oman, Salalah has the benefit of the annual Indian monsoon, locally known as the *khareef*. The monsoon season extends from early June to mid September, and transforms the arid countryside into a veritable garden with tumbling waterfalls and meandering streams. During the *khareef* is the best time to visit Salalah. In July and August, the government hosts for the annual Khareef Festival, a cultural highlight of the season.

Salalah is steeped in myths and legends that date back to biblical times. In the Jebel Qara can be found the tomb of the Prophet Ayoub, better known as Job of the Old Testament. In Khawr Rhoiri lie the ruins of the palace reputed to be that of the Queen of Sheba. For most of the year, except during the khareef season, the unspoiled beaches of Salalah are ideal for scuba diving, canoeing, sailing, and jet skiing. The marshy khawrs along the coast line are sanctuaries to a broad variety of migrating birds turning the region into a bird watchers paradise. But during the summer, Salalah is easily Oman's coolest destination to visit with its crisp unpolluted air, cool misty climate, high rolling seas and leafy ambience.

OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST



Wahiba Sands - Distance from Muscat: 190 kms. Average drive time: 2 hours. It is best to hire a 4-wheel drive. You can reach the Wahiba Sands by saloon car but a 4-wheel drive is needed to explore the desert. The great Wahiba Sands are longitudinal dunes 200 km long and 100 km wide running south from the Eastern Hajar to the Arabian Sea. The dunes are 100-150 meters high in shades of color from orange to hues of amber. Bedouin camps can be found along the tracks and trails in this isolated desert. In sporadic areas can be found stands of single-species woodlands. Where the sands meet the ocean, outcrops of aolianite (sand compressed into rock) can be found displaying unusual and attractive abstract shapes. Here the beaches mellow into soft shades of yellows and whites.

To the west of the Wahiba are the small towns of Rawdah, Samad Ash Shan, Al Akdar and Lizq. Rawdah and Samad Ash Shan contain ruins and reconstructions of old forts, while Al Akdar is the home of Omanis pit weavers who design elegant textiles from their looms dug into the ground. At Lizq can be found remains of structures that date back to the Bronze Age. South of Lizq are the prosperous towns of Al Mundaybi and Sinaw where most every day one can find the bustling Bedouin *souq* at the centre of town.

- **Musandam Peninsula**

Distance from Muscat: 500 km. Average drive time - 6 hours; 45 minutes by air. By car one can reach Khasab, the primary town in the region, by driving along the Batinah coast. The drive requires passing through the United Arab Emirates for which a visa is necessary. Daily flights from Muscat are operated by Oman Air. No visas required. Musandam is dubbed the "Norway of the Middle East" because of the inlets likened to Norway's fjords. Traveling by air provides a spectacular view. The stark mountains of this region rise 2000 meters out of the Arabian Gulf. The patterns and textures of the mountains are striking. From November to March is an ideal time to visit Musandam.

- **Masirah Island**

Masirah is idyllic for those who really want to get away from it all. It is an island in the Indian Ocean, 20 km off the central coast of Oman, just south of the Wahiba Sands. The stark rocky landscape is rimmed with isolated beaches whose only visitors are the logger head turtles that come to nest there. Beachcombers may come across a variety of shell fish and other specimens of marine life. There is also evidence of early settlements. From Muscat you drive to Sana, from where you catch the ferry to the Island (1h).

- **Jebel Akhdar**

Jebel Akhdar in Arabic means "Green Mountains" noting its rich vegetation. To visit there requires a 4-wheel drive and a road permit because of military installations in the area. One of the most scenic areas in Oman, coupled with the friendly local inhabitants, this region is a natural spot for tourism. The climate is moderate year round as the mean altitude is 1800 meters. Also of interest is the lookout over the canyon recently named Diana's Point, for the late Princess of Wales who spent time here in the late 80s.

TRADITIONAL MARKETS

Oman is a blend of the new and the old. This is true not just of the city's architecture, attitudes and customs, but also of its shopping. Here you will find a mix of the snazziest shopping malls and the wonderfully quaint traditional markets or *souqs*.



Muttrah Souq

In the heart of the city, within five minutes walking distance from the Al Amana Centre, a tall arch frames the entrance to the Muttrah Souq, the oldest and by far the most well known in Oman. Here the old and the new mingle and the present revisits the past as visitors throng its quaint and charming interiors.

The *souq* is a shoppers' delight offering anything from wallets for RO 1 to antique khanjars for RO 1,000. Frankincense, silverware, antiques and garments are the most sought after items.

The *souq* retains much of its old world charm with row upon row of matchbox size shops. Traders sell the fragrant incense known as *bukboor*, combining various raw materials such as sandalwood, frankincense and natural oils.

You can purchase souvenirs like coffee pots, Bedouin jewelry, *dishdashas* (traditional men's robe), *kummas* (caps), *massar* (turban) and *khanjar* (dagger) for the men; *abayyas* (traditional women's robe), *surwal* (trousers), and *libaff* (shawl) for the women.

The *souq* is best enjoyed when you can take your time to take in all the sights and sounds. It is least crowded in the mornings and late afternoon, and busiest in the evening hours after 6 pm. You will find that certain types of stores tend to cluster together. Therefore you will find all the gold shops in one area, antiquities in another, textiles in yet another, and so on. The prices for most items are negotiable and haggling is a long standing tradition. As a rule of thumb, it is not necessary to haggle for anything less than one Rial. Even if you don't buy anything, the *souq* is well worth a visit to see the lifestyle of a bygone time.

Modern Replica Souqs

In the Sabco Centre Mall and the Capital Commercial Centre you can find upscale replicas of the traditional *souq*. Here, merchandise is a combination of authentic artifacts, cheap reproductions (kitsch) and trendy items usually reserved for the malls (such as perfume, watches and knick-knacks. Do not hesitate to negotiate on prices.

FORTS & CASTLES

Forts and Castles are Oman's most striking cultural landmarks and together with their towers and city walls, have historically been used as defensive bastions or look-out points. Forts were often the seats of administrative and judicial authority. There are over 500 forts, castles, and towers in Oman. With a coastline of 1,700 km, they were needed to protect it from potential invaders. The styles vary, being determined by the architects who built them or the periods in which they were built.

Jalali and Mirani



These two forts are among Oman's most famous and stand at the entrance to Muscat Bay. Mirani, which was built before the arrival of the Portuguese, was originally shaped like a tower. Then in 1588 the Portuguese rebuilt it on the ruins of its old structure, adding emplacements, stores, living quarters for the commander and a place of worship. The building was enlarged to its present size during the reign of Imam Ahmed bin Said, the founder of the Al Busaidi state in the 18th century, and his grandson, Sayyid Said bin Sultan, at the beginning of the 19th century. The Portuguese completed their construction of Jalali Fort in 1587. Its present-day form dates from the reign of Sayyid Said bin Sultan, and this Fort was restored and converted into a museum in the reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Rustaq Fort

The Rustaq Fort is amongst the oldest, is the tallest, and is surrounded by four prominent watch towers. The fort was originally constructed on Persian ruins in the 13th century. It has four towers: Al Burj Al Ahmar, Al Burj Al Hadeeth, Al Burj Al Reeh, and Al Burj Ashiateen (which means, ominously, the devil's tower). A *falaj* ran through the fort to supply water to its inhabitants. Should this become contaminated, the inhabitants were able to rely on a well. There are many rooms to this fort and it also boasts a mosque, weapons' room, prison, and reception area.

Bahla Fort

The main feature is its seven miles of walls that were patrolled by sentries night and day. The fort's internal staircases and walls were built of mud, coated with gypsum and *sarooj* (a traditional type of mortar), which are as hard and solid as present-day cement. UNESCO has approved Bahla Fort and its wall for inclusion in its World Heritage List.

Nizwa Fort

Nizwa Fort was built by Imam Sultan bin Saif al Ya'arubi in 1668. It is the largest fort in the Arabian Peninsula with an exterior diameter of its circular structure of 150 feet, and over 115 feet high. The fort was once used as the Imam's headquarters and is a stronghold designed to withstand some of the most aggressive sieges. The traditional doors are inches deep and over the lintel of each is a hole through which boiling date syrup could be poured over the marauding enemies.

Jabrin Fort

Jabrin Fort was built by Imam Sultan bin Saif Al Ya'arubi in 1670 as a defensive stronghold and as living accommodation for the Imam. It has rooms and ceilings decorated with fine carvings. It has two

huge towers with walls two meters thick. It was built by Bil'arab bin Sultan, an Imam of the Ya'aruba dynasty during the 17th century. It is one of the most impressive forts in the Sultanate and the details and carvings in the rooms and balconies are most elaborate. Finely painted flowers and symbols are found on the ceilings in the living areas. The tomb of Imam Bil'arab remains within the fort.

Nakhl Fort

Nakhl Fort is within an hour's drive of Muscat and provides a morning of sight-seeing. The fort is 350 years old and is set in a gorge surrounded by a mountain enclave. In 1990, sympathetic restoration work began using traditional building materials and period furnishings. The carved master gate is believed to date back to the 1830's during the reign of Sayyid Said bin Sultan.

Al Hazm Castle

Located in the town of Al Hazm in the Rustaq area, it was completed by Imam Sultan bin Seif II in 1711 A.D. In doing so Imam Sultan also established Al Hazm as the capital of Oman instead of Rustaq. The castle is distinctive from other Omani castles and forts by its magnificent shape and massive building. It contains the tomb of its builder, Imam Sultan II. It was restored in 1996 A.D.

Sohar Castle

Dating back to the 9th century, the castle was renovated to its present shape in the 15th century. During the reign of Imam Nasser bin Murshid Al Ya'arubi, he was able to conquer and expel the Portuguese from this fortress. The castle became an administration center for the ruling Al Busaid dynasty. The castle was restored in 1985 and became a museum in 1993.

Mirbat Castle

The old incense port of Mirbat in the south of Oman is remarkable for being the site of one of the last battles in the world involving conventional attack and defense of a fortress, which occurred during the Dhofar rebellion in the early 1970s. Dating back to the 19th century, this castle played defensive and administrative roles throughout its history. It was restored in 1991 and was officially opened in 1996 on the occasion of the Year of Heritage.

Khasab Castle

Located opposite the sea coast in the north of Oman, it consists of four buildings surrounded by a wall and it was built in the sixth century A.D. It was restored in 1989.

Al Mintrib Castle

One of the oldest castles in district of Badiya, it was built during the reign of Imam Azzan bin Qais Al Busaid in the 19th century and was used as a center for the district. It was restored in 1989.

MUSEUMS



Bait Al Zubair, Old Muscat

Theme: An extensive private collection of ethnographic material including Omani jewellery, weaponry, costume, maps, engravings, old photographs and household artifacts, in addition to outdoor displays of traditional architecture. This active museum frequently hosts temporary regional/ international exhibitions.

Location: In Al Saidu Street in old Muscat go through Muscat Gate and the museum is just after the bend on the right-hand side of the road (opposite Bait Muzna Gallery)

Operated by: Bait Al Zubair Foundation

Entrance fee: R.O. 1/- (foreigners) 500 Baisa (Omanis and Gulf) 250 Baisa Children (Free for the children under 10 Years) – guide available for R.O. 5/-. All educational groups with prior bookings are complimentary – and worksheets are available.

Opening times: Saturday to Thursday from 0930 to 1300 hours and 1600 to 1900 hours (the museum is open during public holidays)

Contact: 24736688

Facilities: Coffee shop, gift shop, parking, disabled access and washrooms, private banqueting, traditional entertainment, temporary exhibition/ events hall, lectures, venue for private/corporate events, educational services.

Bait Al Baranda Museum, Muscat

Theme: Located in a historic building it presents the story of Muscat from over 100 million years ago to the present day. Interactive exhibits include plate tectonics, geology, early human settlements, Al Busaid Dynasty, Muscat today and folk art. There is also space for workshops and exhibitions.

Location: Muttrah – between Al Mina (the port) roundabout and Muttrah Corniche.

Operated by: Muscat Municipality

Opening times: Saturday to Thursday from 0900 to 1300 hours – 1600 to 1800 hours

Entrance fee: R.O. 1/- (adults) 500 Baisa (children)

Contact: 24714262

Facilities: parking

Omani French Museum, Muscat

Theme: A museum situated in a historical building that was the former French Consulate. The displays detail Omani-French relations.

Location: Go through Bab Al Kabir (the big gateway) in old Muscat, where the police station is on the left down Qasr Al Alam Street that leads you to the palace, the museum is on the right hand side.

Operated by: Ministry of Heritage and Culture

Entrance fee: 500 Baisa (adults) 200 Baisa (children from 6 - 12 years)

Opening times: Sat - Wed 08:00 – 13:00 hours, Thursday 09:00 13:00 (1st October to 31st March also open from 1600-1800 hours)

Contact: 24736613

Facilities: parking, disabled access

Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, Ruwi

Theme: It displays an introduction to major historical events as well as highlighting the history of The Sultan's Armed Forces, with extensive outdoor displays featuring military equipment.

Location: in Bait Al Falaj a restored fortress

Operated by: Ministry of Defence

Entrance fee: RO. 1.000 (foreigners) 500 Baisa (Omanis) children are free

Opening times: Saturday to Wednesday 0800 – 1300 hours

Thursday and Friday 0800 - 1100 hours and 1600 - 1800 hours

Contact: 24312651

Facilities: parking

Oil and Gas Exhibition Centre and Planetarium, PDO

Theme: interactive displays that detail the development of the petroleum industry in Oman. The Planetarium features special shows relating to astronomy.

Location: Seih Al Maleh Street, Qurum between PDO – Gate No 2

Operated by: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO)

Opening times: Saturdays to Wednesdays from 0700 to 1600 hours on Thursdays 0700 to 1200 hours

Entrance fee: Free

Contact: 24677834

Facilities: parking

Bait Adam Museum, Qurum 16

Theme: A private collection representing the history of Oman featuring coins, stamps, maps, historical documents and artifacts.

Location: Building 2881, Way No. 2333 (in the area opposite Medinat As' Sultan Qaboos)

Operated by: Mr. Latif Al Balushi

Entrance fee: R.O. 3/- per person, which includes a guided tour

Opening times: Saturday to Thursday from 0900 to 1300 hours and 1600 to 1900 hours

Contact: 24605033 / 99356676

Facilities: parking, disabled access, traditional Omani banqueting.

Natural History Museum, Al Khuwair

Theme: An interactive museum offering an introduction to Oman's natural environment and the diversity of its wildlife, in addition there is a section on geology, a whale hall and a small botanical garden.

Location: In the Ministry of Heritage and Culture complex Al Khuwair. Take the turning opposite the Ice Skating Rink on the dual carriageway going towards Seeb airport sign posted Al Wazarat Street at the roundabout turn left and the Ministry and museum is on the right.

Operated by: Ministry of Heritage and Culture

Entrance fee: 500 Baisa (adults) 200 Baisa (children) and 100 Baisa (under 6 years)

Opening times: Sat - Wed 08:00 – 13:00 hours, Thursday 09:00 13:00 (1st October to 31st March also open from 1600-1800 hours)

Contact: 24641510

Facilities: book sale at reception, disabled access, parking

Museum of Omani Heritage, Medinat Al Alam

Theme: An ethnographic museum in a splendid location overlooking the northern part of the capital area, the ground floor features traditional ways of livelihood in Oman, the first floor displays 'the cycle of life' from birth to old age. (formally known as the Oman Museum).

Location: Al Alam Street, on the hill behind the Ministry of Information, Way 1566

Operated by: Ministry of Heritage and Culture

Entrance fee: 500 Baisa (adults) 200 Baisa (children) and 100 Baisa (under 6 years)

Opening times: Sat - Wed 08:00 – 13:00 hours, Thursday 09:00 13:00 (1st October to 31st March also open from 1600-1800 hours)

Contact: 24600946

Facilities: book sale at reception, disabled access, parking, roof terrace coffee shop.

Sohar Fort Museum, Sohar

Theme: An archaeological and historical museum featuring exhibits on Sohar throughout history situated in the historic fort.

Location: In the town of Sohar approx 2 hours from Muscat

Operated by: Ministry of Heritage and Culture

Entrance fee: 500 Baisa (adults) 200 Baisa (children) Family Visit (300 Baisa adults and 100 Baisa for children)

Opening times: Sat - Wed 08:00 – 13:00 hours, Thursday 09:00 13:00 (1st October to 31st March also open from 1600-1800 hours)

Contact: 26844758

Facilities: parking

OTHER INTERESTING SITES TO VISIT IN THE CAPITAL AREA

Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque



Began in 1992 under a royal directive and completed in 2001, the Grand Mosque is the third largest mosque in the world, hosting the largest woven Persian carpet and chandelier in the world. The complex is built on an area of around 40,000 square meters. Five minarets stand symbolising the five pillars of Islam.

Admission is free and visiting hours for non-Muslims are restricted to Saturday through Wednesday from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. On holidays and Islamic festivals, non-Muslims are not allowed.

Dress Code

Women – head should be covered and clothing such that no skin shows except one's face, hands, and feet (no ankles). Men – T-shirts are allowed, but not shorts.

Cemetery Cove

When learning of the many pioneers in the history of the American Mission, one becomes aware that many died while serving this country. There is a cove, most easily accessible by sea, where several have been buried along with sailors and other expatriates who sojourned in Oman. For many connected to the mission's history, it is a place of pilgrimage.

NOTES: