



Travel through Oman

14 DAYS CULTURE AND NATURE TRIP

 GOLDEN
HIGHLANDS
YOUR TICKET TO OMAN

GENERAL INFORMATION

CULTURE AND NATURE TRIP

DATE 23 JAN TO 6 FEB

GUIDES Dr Gösta Hoffmann and Valeska Decker



SCHEDULE

- DAY 1 Arrival at Muscat International Airport, transfer to hotel [Al Hail Waves Hotel, Muscat]
- DAY 2 Cultural highlights of Muscat: Grand Mosque, Souq, National Museum [Al Hail Waves Hotel, Muscat]
- DAY 3 Halban beehive tombs, Nakhel Fort, viewpoint Wadi Kabir [fieldcamp, Siffah Beach]
- DAY 4 Mountain and coastal environments: Mangrove ecosystems, folded rocks [fieldcamp, Fins Beach]
- DAY 5 Wadi Shab, Bimmah Sinkhole, coastal terraces [fieldcamp, Fins Beach]
- DAY 6 Tsunami history of Oman, traditional wooden boat factory in Sur, turtles [fieldcamp, Ras al Hadd]
- DAY 7 Sand desert, dune driving, climate change in SE Arabia [fieldcamp, Sharquiyah Sands]
- DAY 8 Historical centre of Ibra, Birkat al Mouz, farming [Al Hail Waves Hotel, Muscat]
- DAY 9 Individual choice - Beach day/Shopping/Snorkelling [Al Hail Waves Hotel, Muscat]
- DAY 10 Visit to the Saiq Plateau [fieldcamp, al Hamra]
- DAY 11 Historical capital Nizwa, Jebel Shams, Misfah al Abbriyen, al Hamra [fieldcamp, al Hamra]
- DAY 12 Off-road experience Wadi Bani Awf, mountain traverse [fieldcamp, Wadi al Abyadd]
- DAY 13 Geological hike through Wadi al Abbyad [fieldcamp, Wadi al Abyadd]
- DAY 14 Sawadi, swimming, beach [Al Hail Waves Hotel, Muscat]
- DAY 15 Depart from Muscat International Airport

CONDITIONS

PRICE 2,550 €

price per person, based on two people sharing one room
for single occupancy supplement applies

PRICE INCLUDES

5 nights in Al Hail Wave Hotel incl. breakfast + BBQ dinner on day 14
9 nights in a fully equipped field camp including full board
Transport: Airport shuttle, transportation during the trip

NOT INCLUDED

flights, visa, entrance fees, 4 dinners during our stays in Muscat,
transportation and lunch on Day 9

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DAY 1 – MUSCAT

Sun, 23.1. - Arrival at Muscat International Airport, transfer to hotel

We arrive at Muscat International Airport. You are picked up and transferred to the nearby Al Hail Waves Hotel. Restaurants and ATMs as well as the beach are in walking distance.

DAY 2 – MUSCAT

Mon, 24.1. - Cultural highlights of Muscat: Grand Mosque, Souq, National Museum

After a full breakfast at the hotel we have a gathering with the team of Golden Highlands and you will meet your drivers. After a twenty minute ride through the busy morning traffic of Muscat we arrive at the Grand Sultan Qaboos Mosque. The largest mosque in Oman fascinates the visitor through its architectural magnificence. We have a walk through the mosque and see the different prayer rooms. After some refreshment we continue to the old city centre where we visit the National Museum. Our first picnic lunch is served at Al Riyam Park. After lunch we hike the ancient donkey road that connects the old parts of the city. Make sure to wear sturdy boots. After 4 km and some stunning views on the fortification of Muscat we arrive at the traditional market, Muttrah Souq. (If you don't want to do the 4 km hike you can be dropped by a driver and join us at the souq.) You have some time to wander around the souq and enjoy the colourful little shops and the harbour promenade while drinking a fruit juice or a karak, a traditional tea with milk and cardamom. We drive back to the Al Hail Waves Hotel and stay a second night.

DAY 3 – AL SIFFAH

Tue, 25.1. - Halban beehive tombs, Nakhel Fort, viewpoint Wadi Kabir

We Today is all about archaeological highlights of Muscat capital area. After checking out at the hotel and organising our luggage in the cars we drive to the so-called Beehive Tombs in Halban. These are Bronze Age tombs which are about 5000 years old, built by the first settlers in Oman. There are hundreds of these tombs in the whole country, mostly perched on top of mountain ridges.

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We arrive. The second stop is Nakhel Fort. We explore the ancient fort and enjoy the magnificent view over the town of Nakhel. The pre-Islamic fort is built on top of an ancient atoll which was moved by tectonic shifts. We can even find some marine fossils in the rocks below the walls. Lunch is provided near the Hot Springs of Nakhel. After lunch you can enjoy the traditional Omani coffee, Kahwa, with some dates while sitting by the Hot Spring. Afterwards, we drive outside the city and after a short hike of about 20 minutes we have a breath-taking view over a part of Muscat. That part of the city is embedded in the Wadi al Kabir, which means “the large wadi”, with steep rocky walls. We discuss urban development and possible hazards. Tonight is our first night out in the field. We meet the Golden Highlands camp-team at Siffah beach where we get an introduction into the camp facilities. You set up your tent within walking distance of the beach and can relax until dinner is served.

DAY 4 – FINS

Wed, 26.1. - Mountain and coastal environments: Mangrove ecosystems, off-road driving and mountain oases

After We wake up with the sun emerging from the emerald blue waters from the Arabian sea. Buffet breakfast is served with European as well as Omani specialities, fresh fruits and coffee. This day is devoted to mountain and coastal environments. Our first stop is the nature reserve Bandar al Khayran where we visit the mangrove forest. This densely vegetated coastal area is a delicate ecosystem that serves as a safe haven for a variety of wildlife as well as a zone of coastal protection toward tsunamis or storms. We head to the east and drive through the Wadi al Mayh where we can see spectacular folded rocks which are unique on our planet. Lunch is served by the team of Golden Highlands in a shady place. In the afternoon we explore the eastern Hajar Mountains and visit the huge Daiqa Dam, one of the most spectacular river dams on the Arabian Peninsula. We continue along off-road on small winding gravel roads through the mountains with views of spectacular mountain oases. In late afternoon we arrive at the camp site on the beach near Fins. You can go swimming or take a walk along the beautiful beach.

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DAY 5 – FINS

Thu, 27.1. - Wadi Shab, Bimmah Sinkhole, coastal terraces

After breakfast we head south for a couple of kilometres, park our cars at the mouth of the famous Wadi Shab gorge. We go by boat and then hike through the canyon with its hanging gardens and turquoise pools. Wadi Shab is one of the very few wadis with a perennial stream, fed by water from the plateau high in the mountains. We learn about the cultivated plants and natural vegetation living in this unique ecological environment. We take a refreshing bath and immerse ourselves into the crystal blue water in one of the pools from where we continue the journey by swimming. Proper shoes like sandals are recommended as there are swimming and walking parts in this part of the wadi. We reach at a magnificent cave with mystical light highlighting a waterfall. You have time to explore the site before we return to the starting point after one hour. Alternatively, you can wait at the pool or explore the beautiful wadi on your own. We meet at the mouth of Wadi Shab where our Omani team prepares the lunch buffet. Our next stop is the famous Bimmah Sinkhole, a weathering phenomenon which results in a hole filled with crystal clear water. Here you have the opportunity to enjoy of a fish pedicure spa. We explore the coastal terraced landscape where archaeological evidence indicates the presence of Neolithic hunter and gatherer communities with gazelles being their prey. Gazelles still live in this area and maybe you can spot one near our camp as it is situated next to a gazelle reserve. We drive back to the camp and have a second night at Fins beach.

DAY 6 – FINS

Fri, 28.1. - Tsunami history of Oman, traditional wooden boat factory in Sur, turtles

Hopefully you had a restful night in your tent listening to the rippling waves. This morning we learn something about the tsunami potential at this part of the coast. Huge boulders along the coast reflect the enormous power a tsunami wave can have. However, dating a tsunami event and calculating a risk potential for the coastal

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communities are not as easy as it seems to be. We drive east and reach Sur, the second largest city in northern Oman. Sur is famous as a traditional harbour site and was essential for the Omani people as a seagoing nation. Today only little of the ancient glamour and traditional handcraft is left. We visit the only traditional wooden boat factory in Oman where the Omani boats called dhows are still built. Our last stop is a Bronze-Age archaeological site at Ras al Hadd, at the eastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Then we head to the east coast. Tonight our camp is situated idyllically in between some dunes and maybe we will see one of the famous sea turtles laying its eggs. Different sea turtles inhabit the oceans surrounding Oman. At this part of the coast, only the Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) comes on land for nesting.

DAY 7 – SHARQUIYAH SANDS

Sat, 29.1. - Sand desert, dune driving, climate change in SE Arabia

You'll have breakfast with a stunning view over the shimmering Indian Ocean. Maybe we will see some of the sea turtles or even dolphins performing their morning exercises in the ocean. This day we drive through the rugged hinterland where the Bedouin people live a pastoral lifestyle. We see camels along our road where the gravel desert landscape turns into the legendary sand desert of the Sharquiyah Sands. Watch the amazing sunset in the sand dunes of the desert for your most romantic experience and let worldly cares slip away in the the surroundings of the enchanting desert.

DAY 8 – MUSCAT

Sun, 30.1. - Historical centre of Ibra, Birkat al Mouz, farming

In the morning we have a closer look at the variety of dune structures and learn where all this sand comes from that makes up the huge desert in eastern Oman. We leave the camp and the desert and head towards wells, oases and lively villages. Our first stop is the historical centre of Ibra with its ancient adobe structures. Then we drive to Birkat al Mouz, literally translated as 'the village of the banana'

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named after the huge banana plantations. At the foot of the Hajar Mountains we discuss the traditional local crop production based on the legendary irrigation system with its Aflaj. In the afternoon we head back to Muscat and check in to the Al Hail Waves Hotel again. You can have dinner in the nearby restaurants.

DAY 9 – MUSCAT

Mon, 31.1. - Individual choice - Beach day/Shopping/Snorkelling

Today you can choose between a lazy day or join the snorkelling trip. Maybe you want to go shopping in a grand mall or you forgot to buy something on Muttrah souq? You can drive by taxi, the hotel staff will be happy to help you. Another option – and maybe the best - you can choose to join the Paradise Snorkelling trip. Golden Highlands is happy to help you and organise everything. You get picked up at the hotel and drive 10 minutes by car to the The Wave district in Muscat. There you meet your Omani boat crew who take you to the nature reserve of the Daymaniyat Islands. While driving, maybe a group of dolphins accompanies the boat and plays around in the waves. Approaching the snorkelling spot you think you have arrived at Paradise Island with white sandy beaches encircled by the clear blue water of the Gulf of Oman. You receive snorkelling equipment and can start exploring the waters around the island. If you're lucky one of the amazing sea turtles may swim next to you while you discover the colourful marine life along natural coral reefs. After that spectacular snorkelling adventure you can unwind with a refreshment, lying on a pristine beach with white sand and enjoy the stunning view on the seemingly unending horizon of a turquoise ocean. We have a second night in Al Hail Waves Hotel. Dinner is individually tonight.

DAY 10 – AL HAMRA

Tue, 1.2. - Visit to the Saiq Plateau

AfterFrom the coastal Batinah plain around Muscat city we head towards the Hajar Mountains where we drive up the serpentines to the Saiq Plateau. Several wells feed the small village perched on top of the rocky cliffs made up of travertine rocks. In ancient times, people

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established huge terraced farms. We hike through the historic villages and see some beautiful spots but also a lot of fallow land due to decreasing natural water supply which threatens the steady irrigation. Additionally, many young people today leave their home villages and move to Muscat to work there. We explore the Saiq Plateau with its plants and caves and drive down the serpentine road to our field-camp near al Hamra. Tonight we camp just next to an archaeological site called Hasat Bin Sult which we can only explore during night. Thus, our last stop is at the camp in the evening just before dinner.

DAY 11 – AL HAMRA

Wed, 2.2. - Historical capital Nizwa, Jebel Shams, Misfah al Abbriyen, al Hamra

In the morning we explore the historical city of Nizwa which is the former capital of Oman. The city had a strategic position between the desert and the mountains and is still today an important trading centre. Signs of its ancient wealth are the city fortification including the fort in the centre and the surrounding impressive market with distinctive sections. This souq is famous for its date shops providing a plethora of different types of date and date products. After this we drive up the mountain to the top of Jebel Shams. Standing there, you soak up the magnificent view from the 'Mountain of the Sun' into Wadi Nakhr, one of the steepest canyons, also known as the Grand Canyon of Arabia. Sometimes local mountain people come here to sell their handmade goat-hair wristbands. We drive down the Jebel and enjoy our picnic lunch in a shady place. In the afternoon we have a relaxing walk through the village Misfah al Abbriyen. Be charmed by the spirit of the mountain oasis, explore all the different cultivated plants in the lush green oasis and learn about the astronomical method which was used to manage the irrigation system in ancient times. If time permits, we have a stop at the ancient city of al Hamra and walk through its ghost town. Our last stop is a viewpoint from where we see the whole city of al Hamra, the 'Red City' which shimmers in a brownish red in the evening light. We have a second night in our camp near al Hamra.

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DAY 12 – WADI AL ABYADD

Thu, 3.2. - Off-road experience Wadi Bani Awf, mountain traverse

Today our experienced Omani drivers will take us safely through the rough Hajar Mountain area around Wadi Bani Awf. You will be fascinated by the absolute stunning mountain landscape and exciting views. In the afternoon we reach Wadi al Abbyad, the 'White Wadi'. We drive through the light grey wadi gravel and after a 10 minute drive we reach at our camp site on a perched terrace within the wadi. Here you can have a refreshing bath in one of the wadi pools before dinner. Tonight the Omani team also starts to prepare the dinner for tomorrow, a traditional time-consuming Omani dish called Shua. A goat or sheep is carefully prepared with spices and banana leaves and has to be cooked in an earth oven for 24 hours. In Oman Shua is normally served on special days like sacred festivals or weddings.

DAY 13 – WADI AL ABYADD

Fri, 4.2. - Geological hike through Wadi al Abbyad

This wadi is famous worldwide for its fantastic geology which is unique on this planet. Here you can touch rock layers that normally lay 10,000 metres below the ground separating the earth crust from the earth mantle. We hike through the wadi surrounded by an abundance of natural beauty and gorgeous date palms and oleander bushes. We have to cross stretches of shallow water, thus sandals are recommended. Lunch will be served in a shady place in the wadi. We walk back individually and can enjoy a refreshing bathe in one of the lovely pools along the way. There is the possibility to join the Wadi Clean up Campaign that is organised by Golden Highlands. It always attracts a lot of local people, including many students of the university in Muscat. Arriving back at the camp you receive a refreshment and can relax. Tonight we are indulged with the delicious Omani Shua and stay a second night in Wadi al Abbyad.

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DAY 14 – MUSCAT

Sat, 5.2. - Sawadi, swimming, beach

Today we head back to Muscat. On our way we stop at a beach spit near Sawadi. We see the first results of the grand mangrove reforestation campaign initiated by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs. This area was inhabited with mangroves once. Since 2005 great efforts have been undertaken and a new forest has been established by planting more than 104,000 seedlings. You have the opportunity to unwind among the lush green mangroves and take a walk on the beach. We have our last picnic lunch at Sawadi beach and arrive at the Al Hail Waves Hotel in the afternoon. We meet again for a farewell BBQ dinner with local fish specialities, served on the hotel roof. We stay the last night at the hotel. Optionally, you can also depart on this evening.

DAY 15 – DEPARTURE

Sun, 6.2. - Depart from Muscat International Airport

Today we leave Muscat and we hope you have absorbed the Omani generosity and feel inspired by Oman's magnificent nature. There will be an organised shuttle to the airport from the hotel. You also have the opportunity to extend your stay in Oman and continue with an individual program. We can offer a rental car and a program that suits your needs.

LOGISTICS

TRANSPORT

You will enjoy the trip with experienced Omani drivers at your site. We use Toyota Landcruisers with 4-wd and AC. All cars are regularly checked.

ACCOMMODATION

The Al Hail Waves Hotel provides comfortable rooms and a delicious breakfast buffet which will fulfil all your needs. Our price includes one bed in a double-bedroom.

Alternatively, you can choose the comfort of a single room.

During your stay in the hotel you can enjoy a relaxing walk along the nearby beach or unwind in the open-sky swimming pool.

For a refreshment just chose one of the tiny restaurants. You also find a supermarket and an ATM within walking distance. In the evening feel enchanted by a stunning view from the rooftop on Muscat.



FIELD-CAMP

During our stay in the field we hope to fulfil all your needs in a fully equipped field-camp with utmost comfort. The Golden Highlands Camp-team will delight you with a rich breakfast buffet in the morning and fresh cooking in the evening, always including a vegetarian option if requested. They're happy to help you with everything you need. Golden Highlands provide tents (single or double) and mattresses. Camp facilities also include an outdoor-bathroom with washbasin, shower and toilet. In the evening you always have the possibility to charge your devices like mobile and camera. Most of the time we can also provide internet access if needed.

DAILY LUNCH

Our Omani team serves a lunch buffet at pleasant spots so you'll have a relaxing rest in the shade and can enjoy your meal during your daily tour. The lunch includes a small warm meal, refreshing vegetable salads and fresh fruits. Additionally, you can choose between various ice-cold soft drinks. After lunch and in between we offer home-made Omani Kahwa, the traditional Omani coffee, served with local delicacies like dates or halwa.

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