



OMAN DESERT EXPEDITIONS

'In the Footsteps of Thesiger' Desert Journey



Our five day journey through the sands of Oman gives you the opportunity to step out of our increasingly busy, wired and overcrowded life, and look in ... an opportunity to redefine your values, and to put life in perspective.

Return motivated, refreshed and energised. Learn how to bake your own bread under the sand, learn how to grind your own cardoman coffee, and how to navigate by the sun and the stars. Re-discover yourself.

The journey – Our 'In the footsteps of Thesiger' journeys involve trekking on foot through the desert, using camels for support. Our route north, from the coast of the Arabian sea into the heart of the desert, follows that of an ancient trade route across the sands called the Darb Muqta'a Habl, which translates into 'the route that cuts between the tallest dunes'. The summer monsoon, which makes the sea too rough for fishing, co-incides with the date harvest to the north of the sands, so in the days before vehicles, each summer the fishing Bedouin used to travel north on camel to help with the harvest, before returning at the end of the monsoon.

Crossing the desert traditionally involved a waterless journey of five days or more on camel, so it was not undertaken lightly, or often.

Our journey will be at a steady, but leisurely pace, enabling you to enjoy the desert landscape and wildlife to the full. Discover yourself, and just what it was that made the legendary explorer Wilfred Thesiger have so much respect for this land and the people that live here.

The desert - Our journeys take place in the Sharqiya Sands, an area of dunes the size of Wales, some four hours drive south of the capital city, Muscat. The dunes, that reach up to 100 metres in height, run for about 180 km north to south. The Sharqiya desert is a beautiful, peaceful but powerful place. It appears at first glance to be devoid of life, but reality is very different. An intensive three year research programme undertaken by the Royal Geographical Society in the 1980s identified 150 species of plants, 200 species of birds, amphibians and reptiles, and 16,000 invertebrates. Such an unexpected diversity of life is partly explained by the regular dew and fog that results from being so close to the sea, that can deposit an equivalent of up to 1mm of rainfall each night.

Key Information

Group Size and Structure...

the journey is based on a minimum group size of 6, and is usually limited to 12, as we believe this maximises the wilderness and social experience. The size of the group can be larger for groups who have specific needs.

Our groups vary widely in terms of experience and age. We welcome anyone from the complete beginner to a seasoned expert – all that is needed is a passion for the outdoors, and a reasonable degree of fitness.

Your Guide...

Mark Evans has been exploring the deserts of the Middle East for fifteen years, and has lived in Oman for seven. Currently executive director of Outward Bound Oman, he is a Fellow of the Explorers Club of New York, and has led numerous expeditions to the ice deserts of the Arctic, including a year-long overwintering on Svalbard, several of which have been featured on BBC Radio 4 and on BBC World News. Mark has published three books on expeditions in Oman. He is an avid birdwatcher, drives a battered old Land Rover and in 2011 was awarded the MBE for his work in using desert journeys to promote cultural understanding between young people from the Arab and western worlds.

Meeting Instructions...

participants will be notified of the assembly place and time in Muscat two weeks prior to the journey.

A typical day...

might involve waking up about 0600 to enjoy the desert sunrise before re-stoking the embers of the fire to warm up ... you can sleep inside a tent, or under the stars as you choose. By 0730 breakfast will be on the go, and the camels will be ready to move anytime from 0830 onwards. You will carry a small daypack with your personal items that you might need during the day, plus water and a light lunch. The pace will be steady, but with time to enjoy the local wildlife and scenery. Regular breaks will enable us to enjoy coffee and dates, and learn about bedouin hospitality. Tired legs can hop onto one of the three camels we will have, and people can

rotate on and off to break up the walking throughout the day. One of the camels will carry coffee, dates and spare water. At about 1600 hrs each day we will look for a suitable campsite to settle down for the night, set up camp and wait for the desert stars to emerge. Each evening we will grind coffee and bake Bedouin bread under the sand, before heading off to a warm sleeping bag after dinner.

Background reading

to get you in tune before you come;

- For desert exploration and travel: 'Arabian Sands' by Wilfred Thesiger, and 'Arabia Felix' by Bertram Thomas.
- For a more scientific approach: 'The Sea of Sands and Mists', by Nigel Winser.
- To know all there is to know about sand: the bible is 'The physics of blown sand and desert dunes', by Ralph Bagnold.
- For an understanding of desert and regional political history: 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' by T E Lawrence

I have seen some of the most magnificent scenery in the world, and lived amongst tribes who are little known, but none of these places have moved me as did the deserts of Arabia ...

Wilfred Thesiger, Desert Explorer

FAQs

How fit do I need to be?

You don't need to be a marathon runner, but do need to be reasonably fit to get the most out of the journey. Our pace is steady, and we have camels to give tired legs a rest when needed. We will be walking in undulating sand dunes for five to six hours each day. There are no tracks to follow. As a yardstick you do need to be able to walk five to six miles in a day comfortably, for several days.

If you have any concerns regarding your suitability, contact us and we will try to help.

What is provided?

- All transport from the meeting point in Muscat, and return.
- All meals and water whilst on the trip.
- The services of an experienced guide, camels and a Bedouin handler.
- Certain items of group equipment – see equipment list in the FAQ section.

What is not provided?

Transport to and from the start point, including flights. Accommodation in Muscat. Travel insurance and personal equipment and clothing, incidental personal expenditure, visas. Any items not mentioned as provided.

What will the weather be like?

In summer, temperatures can reach up to 48 degrees C in the sands. In winter, it is thankfully much more pleasant. Expect daytime temperatures of 25-30 degrees C, and night time temperatures that will drop down to single digits just before dawn. Due to the proximity of the sea, a heavy dew or fog is not uncommon at dawn. Sandstorms can occur at any time, but rarely last for more than a couple of hours.

What food will we eat?

When Thesiger crossed the Empty Quarter he lived off dates, camel's milk and bread, supplemented by the odd hare or whatever they were able to catch. Our food is similarly relatively simple. Breakfast will consist of juice, coffee, local bread and honey. During the day, we will stop for cardamom infused Arabic coffee that you will have ground and made yourself by hand the previous evening. We will also sample the local dates and traditional Omani halwa. Lunch will be typical walking food – nuts, biscuits and fruit.

What inoculations will I need?

We are not qualified to advise you on medical issues. We recommend that you visit your GP, make sure they know where you are going and what you are doing, and they can advise accordingly.

What equipment do I need to bring, and how do I pack?

Gear for the desert is very simple. Your enemies will be the sun, and flying sand, so think how you can cover up and protect yourself.

We recommend the following; 

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Small daypack (25-35 litres) | <input type="checkbox"/> Crocs to wear in camp at the end of the day (light, and sand runs out easily) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trekking poles | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal wash kit and medication, sun cream, wet wipes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fleece jacket & fleece hat | <input type="checkbox"/> Small personal first aid kit able to deal with blisters, mild pain, upset stomach, re-hydration & insect bites. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lightweight trekking trousers with zip-off legs | <input type="checkbox"/> A camera is good, but remember spare batteries, and keep it in a zip loc bag – one grain of sand can lead to an expensive repair job. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A cotton or silk sleeping bag liner | <input type="checkbox"/> Headtorch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Long sleeved loose fitting shirt | <input type="checkbox"/> Small plastic plate/bowl & cup, & knife/fork /spoon. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> T-shirt | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buff or similar neckwear that can be rolled up over your mouth and nose | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sun hat and glasses (two pairs) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trekking/approach shoes (not boots) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thin socks | |

Pack as small as possible – your main bag will be carried in a support vehicle. To maximize the wilderness experience, the support vehicle will be on call but not in close proximity during the day.

What equipment is provided?

We provide all sleeping bags or blankets, roll mats, tents, emergency shelters and group first aid kits. We also provide you with two 1.5 litre water bottles for you to carry each day. Communal gear such as tents and sleeping bags, plus your main bag, will be carried in a support vehicle.

The harder the life, the finer the person. In the desert I found a freedom unattainable in civilisation; a life unhampered by possessions...Wilfred Thesiger, Desert Explorer

Can I use my mobile phone in the desert?

The desert provides us with the opportunity to escape from the stresses of daily life, so we ask you to respect your fellow travelers and leave your phone at home, or in your bag. There are places where it is possible to get a signal, but in most places there is nothing. We carry a Thuraya Satellite Phone which enables us to make contact with the outside world should we need to.

What airlines fly to Oman?

All flights come in to Muscat, the capital city. Only Oman Air fly direct. Other good airlines that tend to have a short stopover in Dubai, Abu Dhabi or Doha include Emirates, Etihad, Qatar, BA or Swiss.

What about Insurance

Travel and medical insurance are compulsory, and to ensure you are fully protected we recommend your policy includes repatriation and cancellation. Many of our visitors use the 'Trek' policy arranged by The British Mountaineering Council (BMC).

...by stepping out of normal existence, one sees one's life as a whole, in a different perspective ...

Dr. Mike Stroud, Polar Explorer

How do I get a visa?

Tourist visas can be secured on landing for most nationalities.

Ensure your passport is valid for at least 6 months after your arrival. If you are unsure about your status, contact the Oman Embassy in London for advice (167 Queens Gate, Kensington O207 225 0001)

How much spending money?

In Muscat most credit cards are widely used and accepted, and cash-point machines abound. You don't need much spending money, perhaps only for gifts you may wish to take home, such as Frankincense. You may have the opportunity to buy some local weavings made by Bedouin girls in the desert – for this you need to bring along small denomination Omani rials-credit cards are definitely not accepted!

Need somewhere to stay in Muscat, or extending your trip to Oman?

Hotels we recommend – all can be Googled at your leisure;

Bottom End – Naseem Hotel, Mutrah

A Lonely Planet favourite, we love it - basic but clean and friendly, and the best location of any hotel in Muscat, a short walk to the souq, fish market and Bait Al Baranda Museum.

Mid-Range – IBIS, Golden Tulip, Park Inn and Holiday Inn are all located in Muscat, and offer competitive rates.

Top End – Choose from many – Intercontinental, The Chedi, Al Bustan and Shangri-La are the best of the bunch.

For something different – try one of the cosy boutique hotels that are rapidly appearing; we really like L'Espace.

How to Book a Place on the Journey

You can reserve your place on the trip either by email, telephone or fax. We will then send you a booking form.

Your place on the trip is not guaranteed until your completed booking form has been returned to us, along with your deposit.

For more information,
our contact details are as follows;

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