

Mountains and Deserts of Oman

8-day exploration of Oman's mountain and desert landscapes,



Introduction

On this exploration of Oman's desert and mountain landscapes, students will journey deep into the Al Hajar Mountain Range, home to Oman's most stunning mountains, including Jebel Shams (the 'Mountain of the Sun') and Jebel Akhdar (the 'Green Mountain'). Here they will explore a varied landscape of steep-sided wadis, grand canyons and dramatic gorges, learning more about the region's unique flora and fauna as they progress, and about its culture.

From the mountains, their journey will take them down into the desert sands, as they explore the Sharqiya (Wahiba) Sands on foot in the company of Bedouin guides and camels. Following the ancient 'Darb Muqta'a Habl' trade route, which translates as 'the route that cuts between the tallest dunes', the students will learn more about the desert environment and the Bedouin community that depends on it.

The expedition, organised in partnership with the organisers of the UN Connecting Cultures programme in Oman, is intended to provoke inter-cultural dialogue as well as a greater understanding of the natural world. During their expedition, students will not only encounter a challenging environment, they will also come face-to-face with their own pre-conceptions about the Arab/Muslim world, as they visit Omani villages and meet local youngsters and adults.

Your Financial Protection

All monies paid by you for the air holiday package shown [or flights if appropriate] are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3145.

For more information see our booking terms and conditions.

Itinerary

Day 1 (Saturday) – Depart London Heathrow

Depart UK on Gulf Air at 22:05, connecting via Bahrain and arriving Muscat the next day.

Day 2 (Sunday) – Arrive Muscat

Arrive into Muscat approx. 11:30am. Meet and greet at airport and then a 90 minute drive to the village of Birqat Ak Mauz (pool of the bananas), which guards the only entry up to the Saiq Plateau, a large, flat area at 6-7,000 feet on the Jebel Akhdar mountain. Here pomegranates, roses and apricots grow.

When we arrive on the plateau, we shall get ourselves organized and set up our high altitude camp at 7,500 feet. Students will be briefed on the local area and Oman in general, and taught how to use GPS and radios during a mini navigation course. Kit will be issued this evening. The group will be asked to help with the dinner preparations. Following this will be a briefing for the next day, before the students retreat to their tents for our a night under canvas.

Day 3 (Monday) – Mountain trekking

Wake early (approx. 6am). After breakfast and energisers, the students will help break up camp and clean the site. At approx. 8am, we begin our journey through the mountain, following old donkey trails that used to connect the villages before roads arrived. The scenery is amazing! The guides will break periodically to explain more about the local geography and culture. 400 year old Juniper Trees provide shade from the sun – while serving as ideal outdoor classrooms!

We will trek for approx. 4 hours until noon, then lunch and rest during the midday heat, before continuing in the afternoon for a further two to three hours.

In the evening, set up camp and reflect on the experiences of the past day and the plans for tomorrow.

Each day's trek length will be set by the guides as they ascertain the strength of the group. For a guideline: it is possible to trek as little as 5 miles and as much as 20 miles on these mountain trekking days.

Day 4 (Tuesday) – Mountain trekking

Our journey continues down steep-sided wadis, enjoying spectacular views and maybe spotting the odd vulture and wolf trap along the way. This evening there will be an opportunity to visit a local Jebali family to learn more about life in the mountains.

Day 5 (Wednesday) – Transfer to Desert.

An early morning departure from our mountain home, as we pack up and clean the camping area, then drive south to the Wahiba Sands for the start of our desert expedition. This evening we sleep under the amazing star canopy on the roof of the new Outward Bound Oman Desert Centre.

This wonderful desert learning centre has been built for learning outside the classroom and for scientific research.

Day 6 (Thursday) – Desert trekking

Energisers and breakfast followed by desert briefing. For the desert trek the group will be joined by 2 camels and a Bedouin handler, as we set off through the desert in the footsteps of the famous explorer Wilfred Thesiger, stopping to rest and enjoy a picnic lunch during the midday heat.

Late afternoon, pitch camp. In the evening, enjoy dinner and a fireside discussion about the Bedouin lifestyle and traditions.

Day 7 (Friday) – Desert trekking

Energisers and breakfast, followed by a briefing about the desert flora, fauna, dune formations and weather, before we pack up camp and continue our journey into the desert.

Late afternoon, pitch camp. Fireside discussion and farewell meal with Bedouin hosts.



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Day 8 (Saturday) – Return Muscat

An early morning departure from our desert home to drive back to the capital city of Muscat, stopping at Wadi Bani Khalid, a famous scenic spot, en route. In Muscat, there will be time to visit the souq for some souvenir shopping.

After a farewell shawarma meal at the souq and the presentation of award certificates, we say goodbye to the Omani team and transfer to the airport to catch the late night flight to London via Bahrain, departing at 23:25.

Day 9 (Sunday) – Arrive London

Arrive London Heathrow at 06:25am.



Key Points

Location

Oman is located on the south-eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, and is home to some of the region's most dramatic and beautiful scenery – huge deserts, mountain ranges with fascinating wadis, and many miles of unspoiled beach stretching along the Arabian coastline.

Our mountain and desert expeditions focus on the Hajar Mountains, home to Oman's tallest and most dramatic peaks; and the Wahiba Sands, a vast desert which meets the mountains in the north and the coast in the east.

Elevations

The highest point in Oman is found in the western Hajar, at the summit of Jebel Shams (3,009ms/9,872ft). Our mountain expeditions will typically see students camp at approx. 2,286ms/7,500ft.

The coast and the Wahiba Sands give the lowest elevations.

Climate & Geography

Oman has a hot climate with very little rainfall. Whilst hot all year round, fiercely high temperatures occur May to September. The desert trekking season is October to April, though above 1,900m trekking is possible all year round.

The Hajar Mountains run across Oman from the border with the UAE down to the south-eastern coast. These mountains separate the coastal plains from the interior, which is mainly sand and gravel desert. Though wild and little-developed, the mountains are easily accessible from the capital city Muscat.

Local Laws and Customs

Local laws reflect the fact that Oman is an Islamic country. You should respect local traditions, customs, laws and religions at all times and be aware of your actions to ensure that they do not offend other cultures or religious beliefs, especially during the holy month of Ramadan or if you intend to visit religious areas. Women should dress modestly when in public areas. Clothes should cover the tops of the arms and legs, and underwear should not be



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visible. You should not wear swimming attire in public areas, except on tourist beaches or swimming pools. Women wearing shorts, or tight-fitting clothes, are likely to attract attention.

Photography

Oman is a security-conscious country. Do not photograph anything vaguely military. Do not photograph people, especially women, without asking permission.

Health and Medical Facilities

Medical facilities are generally very good but you should have adequate insurance and sufficient funds to pay for any treatment as many hospitals expect immediate settlement. There is no ambulance service in Oman.

No vaccinations are compulsory but we advise you check with your GP or travel clinic at least 8 weeks before travel. There is a slight risk of malaria in some regions of the country, in particular the Musandam Peninsula, but this does not include Muscat, the Hajar Mountains or the desert. Medical facilities in Oman are very good but you will need adequate travel insurance.

Drinking tap water is not recommended.

General Information

- **Religion** – Oman is a mainly Muslim country and Ramadan is the month during which Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, and feast from dusk until dawn. Normal business patterns may be interrupted, many restaurants close and it is illegal for Muslims and non-Muslims to eat, drink or smoke in public. Alcohol is not served publicly at any time during Ramadan.
- **Language** – Arabic, although English is widely spoken
- **Tipping** – Tipping is not expected in most places though more expensive restaurants tend to include a service charge
- **Bargaining** – Most prices are fixed in Oman, except in the markets/souqs.
- **Time** – 4 hours ahead of GMT
- **Flight Time** - from UK approx. 7 hours
- **British Embassy in Oman** - PO Box 185, Mina Al Fahal, Postal Code 116, Sultanate of Oman (Tel: (+968) 2460 9000)
- **Business Hours:** Normal business hours are 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM and 4 to 7 PM, Saturday–Wednesday; banking hours are generally 8 AM to noon, though some banks reopen from 4 to 6 PM. Banks and businesses close at 11:30 AM on Thursday and remain closed Friday. Business hours are reduced during the Ramadan fast.
- **Electricity** - 240 Volts, alternating at 50 cycles per second. If you travel to Oman with a device that does not accept 240 Volts at 50 Hertz, you will need a voltage converter.

Contact

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