

Oman

Capital

Muscat

Government

Monarchy with a provisional legislature (the Majlis Ash Shura)

Head of State

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said

Major industries

Oil, natural gas, agriculture, and fishing

Ruling body

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said is Head of State and rules by decree. He is assisted by a cabinet of ministers, Diwan of the Royal Court (the central body of bureaucratic affairs), and the Majlis Ash Shura, a body of representatives elected by the populace.

Population

Approximately 2 million. Around 1.5 million are Omani nationals. The remaining are expatriates from India, Asia, other Arab countries, Europe and USA.

Area

The Sultanate encompasses an area of 300,000 sq kms.

Airport

Seeb international airport, 40 km from Muscat city centre.

Seeb International Airport, located in Muscat, serves many international airlines such as British Airways, KLM, Kuwait Airways, Swiss Air and Emirates. The national carrier is Oman Air, which flies to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India, Pakistan, Qatar, Egypt, and Sri Lanka as well as performing domestic flights to Salalah, Masirah Island and Musandam.

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 elsewhere in the interior. Milder weather dominates the mountains and Dhofar region all the year round. Winter temperatures can be as low as 15°Celsius and summer temperatures can be as high as 48° Celsius in Muscat and as high as 54° in the desert.

Dhofar, located in the southern region of the country however, enjoys a regular monsoon between June and October, every year.

Average Temperature in Oman (in Degree Celsius)

	Summer		Winter	
	Day	Night	Day	Night
Muscat	43 C	32 C	25 C	17 C
Salalah	30 C	28 C	28 C	20 C

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 degrees centigrade during the day and dips to 17-19 degrees centigrade at night.

Religion

Islam, predominantly Ibadhi sect.

Language

Official language is Arabic. Other languages spoken include Urdu, Swahili and Baluchi. English is widely spoken and along with Arabic is the common business language. Most Hotel staff speak German and French as well.

Culture

Like all the Arab countries, Arab Islamic Culture dominates the life style in the Sultanate. However, being an international market, people of various other nationalities are also present.

National Dress

Men

- > dishdasha (robe)
- > Kimah (cap)
- > mussar (turban)

Women

- > jallabia (dress)
- > sirwall (trousers)
- > thobe (overdress cloak)
- > lahaf (head shawl)
- > abaya (black cloak)

Women generally leave their face and hands exposed, while in the desert, women of the Bedouin tribes wear a mask, called a "birqa."

Working Hours

Ministries and government establishments: 7:30 am - 2:30 pm (Sat-Wed, week-end is Thursday and Friday)

Private sector companies: 8:00am - 1:00pm; 4:00pm - 7:00pm (Saturday-Wednesday) 8:00am - 1:00pm on Thursdays.

Markets: 8:00am - 1:00pm, 4:00pm - 9:00pm.

Banks: 8:00 am - 12 noon.

Timings differ during Ramadân.

Ramadân, the holy month of fasting, is the ninth month on the Arabic calendar which is a lunar calendar. Every year Ramadân shifts back about ten days on the western solar calendar. In the year 2001 Ramadân will begin in the third week of November. Restaurants and other eateries are closed during daylight hours during the Holy Ramadân period.

Shopping hours

Shopping establishments are open from 9am to 1 pm and 4pm to 9 pm. Department stores, supermarkets and shopping complexes are open throughout the day during Ramadân from 9am to 10 pm, with a short lunch break all through the week, except Fridays. These timings could vary with different shops.

History

Archaeology in Oman is still very much in its infancy. Prior to 1970, only one excavation had been sanctioned in the south of the country. However archaeologists are currently in the process of making exciting discoveries in the Ras Al Hadd area, with remains dating back to the fifth millennium BC and possibly even earlier. It is felt that from this area, perhaps for the first time anywhere in the world, man started to embark on ocean travel. By the third millennium BC, the harbours on the northern coast were on the margins of the trade routes linking Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley. This area then known as Magan was the original source of copper to the ancient world. It supported large communities whose only visible remains now are the plethora of hill top tombs still easily viewed today, if one knows where to look.

It is still not known what led to the decline of this area, but one prime suspect is environmental degradation, caused by overpopulation and deforestation due to the need to smelt the copper ore. Trade with Mesopotamia seems to have ended by 2,000 BC, and this isolation in the north continued for more than a millennium until the region became incorporated into various Persian empires.

The area in the south of modern Oman however, together with what is now part of Yemen, became the source of most of the world's Frankincense. At that time this product was as valuable as oil is today and led to the region becoming a major centre of commerce and great wealth, until its decline after the third century AD. (Pliny writing in the first century AD, stated that control of the Frankincense trade made its people the richest in the world at that time!)

The Arabisation of Oman began around the first century AD, with the migration of Arab tribes from what is now Yemen to south-west Oman. This was caused by the collapse of the Ma'rib dam, and the civilisation it had encouraged. Omanis pride themselves on being among the earliest converts to Islam around 630 AD, and Omanis played a vital role in the spread of Islam to southern Iraq and the conquest of the Persian Empire.

A major theme in Omani history has been the split between the coastal and inland areas. The ancient capital was at Bahla, and by the ninth century, this had shifted to Nizwa. However after

this the capital shifted to Sohar and from then until the present, the coast has remained politically and economically more important. After Sohar, Qalhat to the north west of Sur became the next capital and was visited by Marco Polo. During this time, the country was torn by civil war, and control of the coastal areas passed to dynasties from Persia and later the Portuguese who occupied the major coastal cities in 1507. At this time, Rustaq became the capital city under Omani control. (Ironically it was an Omani navigator who helped cement Portuguese power by guiding Vasco da Gama to India from the coast of east Africa). This power however was in decline by 1622, when Muscat was made the major base in the area, and the Portuguese were finally expelled from the country by the Omanis in 1650. (Incidentally contrary to popular belief, the only major remaining Portuguese buildings are Mirani and Jalali forts in Muscat. All the other forts in the country are totally or mainly of Omani origin). Four years before the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1646, the first treaty of co-operation with the British was signed. This and subsequent treaties marked the beginning of the special relationship between the two countries, that has continued to the present day. The Persians still remained powerful however, and they weren't finally expelled until 1747, by the founder of the present Al bu Said dynasty.

During all of this time, the Imamate based inland around Jebal Akhdar controlled much of the country. During the latter part of the 18th century, there was a rapid growth in Omani military and commercial power, which allowed it to regain and extend the control of key ports in Persia, India, and Zanzibar that it had enjoyed several centuries earlier. Eventually by the start of the 19th century, the Omani empire had extended to control several parts of coastal East Africa as well as Zanzibar, and whole provinces in Persia and Baluchistan in present day Pakistan. (In fact control of the last Omani toehold in Pakistan didn't end until 1958). The Omani empire reached its peak in the middle of the 19th century, under Sultan Said bin Sultan, who made Zanzibar his second (and preferred capital). Dhofar was added to Oman at this time, and Omani control extended far down the coast of East Africa to the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. On his death in 1856, the empire was split in two, one of his sons becoming sultan of Zanzibar (this line continuing there until 1963). Oman itself then went into a period of rapid decline cut off from its most lucrative domains.

The Sultanate of Oman is situated on the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula and is located between Latitudes 16° 40' and 26° 20' North and Longitudes 51° 50' and 59° 40' East. The coastline extends 1,700 Km from the Strait of Hormuz in the north, to the borders of the Republic of Yemen in the south and overlooks three seas: the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

The Sultanate borders Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the West; the United Arab Emirates in the Northeast, the Republic of Yemen in the South; the Strait of Hormuz in the North and the Arabian Sea in the East.

The Musandam Peninsula forms the country's northern tip, and is separated from the rest of the Sultanate by United Arab Emirates' eastern coast and includes the only coast the Sultanate has on the Arabian Gulf.

Musandam is just over 50 Km (30 miles) south of the Islamic Republic of Iran across the Strait of Hormuz.

The total land area is around 309,500 Km² and it is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula.

Topography

Oman possesses a rich diverse topography ranging from rugged mountains and rocky deepwater fjords in the North, to the spectacular dunes of Sharqiyah (Wahiba) Sands and two large salt flats in the centre, to the lush green hills of Dhofar region in the South, with rugged coasts and placid beaches stretching along the 1,700 Km coastline.

The northern coastal strip along the Gulf of Oman is known as the Batinah Coast; a narrow fertile plain separated from the rest of the country by the Hajar Mountains. The highest peak is Jabal Shams (Sun Mountain) at 3,075 m. The southern slopes of the range are notable for their oasis towns where date groves flourish in the dry desert air.

In the south lies the second mountain range in Oman; the Qara Mountains, which attracts the light monsoon rains during the mid-summer months, turning them green with vegetation whose roots help delay the effects of erosion resulting in a soft rolling landscape more akin to central Africa.

As in the north, a narrow fertile coast plain lies between the mountains and the sea at whose centre Salalah lies, surrounded by lush vegetable farms and coconut groves.

Administrative Regions

The Sultanate is divided into eight administrative regions:

3 Governorates:

- > Muscat
- > Dhofar
- > Musandam

5 Regions:

- > Al-Batinah
- > Al-Dhahirah
- > Al-Dakhliyah
- > Al-Sharqiyah
- > Al-Wusta

Each of these is subdivided into smaller districts called Wilayats, which are governed by the Wali the person responsible for administrating the area and reports to the Minister of the Interior.

Muscat is the capital of Oman; a cosmopolitan, but relaxed city, free from the hustle and bustle found in many of Arabia's other capital cities. In the south of the Sultanate, is Salalah; the administrative capital of the Dhofar region.

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", this 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 green lawns and trees. During winter this is interspersed with a profusion of multicoloured flowers. The city 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 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 (interior paved road): 240 km (coastal track).

Average drive time

4 hrs by paved road: 3.5 hrs by coastal track.

How to get there

By buses / coaches belonging to the Oman National tourist Corporation (ONTC). Saloon cars and 4-wheel drives can be hired from Car rental agencies.

Sur, a placid 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 coloured shells, deep ravines, cliffs that fall dangerously into azure seas, rocks sculpted by wind and waves and lush green wadis (river beds). The journey ends in the city famous 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 harbour can be seen against the scenic backdrop of the Gulf of Oman.

On the way to Sur one can stop over the fishing village of Quriyat, which was a major port centuries ago. Wadi Shab is another of the must-see wadis of this region - one of several wadis with running water throughout the year. Beyond Sur about 40 kms away lie the beaches of R'as Al Hadd and R'as Al Junayz where every year about 30,000 turtles come to lay their eggs.

Nizwa

Distance from Muscat

174 km

Average drive time

1 1/2 hours by paved road

How to get there

By buses / coaches belonging to 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 education and art. Nizwa has been an important cross roads 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 Al Ya'ruba dynasty and is Oman's most visited National monument. The reconstructed Sultan Qaboos Mosque is one of the oldest mosques in Oman. 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 and 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 was also built during Al Ya'ruba 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 Misfah Al Abreen.

Western Hajar Mountains

Distance from Muscat

200 km (to Al Hamra)

Average drive time

2.5 hours

How to get there

Saloon cars and 4-wheel drives can be hired from Car rental agencies. Four wheel drives are required for off road into the mountains and wadis.

Beyond Nizwa, the southern flanks of the Western Hajar Mountains can be readily seen rising over 2000 metres above the surrounding countryside. Within these mountains, rugged networks of wadi channels have carved networks of dramatic canyons and caves. The most fertile of these have been cultivated by the hardy shuwawis, mountain people, who have adapted to this harsh lifestyle under the tropic sun. At Wadi Tanuf, the ever-flowing springs are tapped to produce a

commercially popular brand of drinking water. In Al Hamra, 400 year-old mud houses are still standing and occupied to this day. Out along the nearby wadi at Hasat bin Sult Rock, ancient petroglyphs estimated to be over 3000 years old lie in wait. The dark reaches of the Falahi/Hoti cave system await intrepid spelunkers. Hidden neatly in a crevasse on the mountainside lies Misfah al Abreen, a garden paradise of humble farmers and herders.

To the west of Al Hamra is the road to Jebel Shams (mountain of the Sun), the tallest peak in Oman at 3010 metres. Here it is where you can find one of Oman's greatest natural wonders, the Wadi Nakhr Gorge. Inside the canyon, you can haggle with the local rug weavers, trek to the cliff dwellings along the canyon rim and visit remains of towns once occupied ages ago by Persian settlers. Rock climbers will want to test their mettle on the stony crags of Jebel Misht while antiquarians will want to visit the mysterious Beehive Tombs of Bat.

Sumail Gap

Distance from Muscat

75 km

Average drive time

45 minutes

How to get there

Saloon cars can be hired from Car rental agencies.

The only natural pass through the northern jebels traces the trail of the old Silk Route caravans as they carried their goods from the Far East to communities of the interior. Follow the paths taken by Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta to Fanja, the traders' crossroads, and the towns of Bid Bid, Sumail and Al Khobar, replete with castles and fortifications. Stop by the roadside fruit markets of Ad Dasir to sample pomegranates, pumpkin and sweet lemons.

On the far end of the Gap just past Izki is the verdant plantation town of Birkit Al Mawz (which translates "pool of bananas"). Indeed, from the ridge above the town the spreading forest of dates and banana trees give the impression of a deep pool. From this ridge you will see why Birkit Al Mawz is known as the "rainbow city," due to the anticlinal structure of rocks at the base of the ridge behind the town. The rocks frame the old quarter like a rainbow.

Sohar

Distance from Muscat

230 km (by highway)

Average drive time

2 hours

How to get there

By buses / coaches belonging to 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 Majan

(Persian-Mazoun), the city's name alludes from early ship building activity. The word "ma-gan" 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 and the drive to Sohar from Muscat 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.

Wadi Heebi, lying 63 km away from the city is a good destination for picnickers. The village of Heebi is a collection of ancient dwellings with an untouched rustic look. On a 15-minute detour before Heebi village lies the village of Al Ghudafary, which is fed by an old falaj supplying gardens yielding dates and papayas.

Ibra

Distance from Muscat

150 km

Average drive time

1 1/2 hours

How to get there

By buses / coaches belonging to the Oman National tourist Corporation (ONTC). Cars can be hired from Car rental agencies.

The Gateway to the Eastern region of Oman, Ibra, in the past, 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.

Nakhl - Rustaq Loop

Distance from Muscat

120 km

Time taken to reach

1 1/4 hours

How to get there

By car, which can be hired from Car rental agencies.

From the Batinah Coast to the west of Muscat along the base of the jebels are several key towns of special interest. Along the coast is the town of Barka with an impressive fort and Bait Al Naman Castle, an early home for the Al Bu Said dynasty(the current ruling family).

Further along the coast is the Jazir Sawaidi, a small chain of islands near the shore where beach combing, fishing and exploring are the prime activities. Closer to the mountains lie the majestic

fortresses of Nakhl, Rustaq and Al Hazm. restored by the government and preserved as national treasures.

For those bent on trekking, there are many wadis running through the foothills and mountains, many of them with running water. Wadi Abyadh is ideal for picnicking, while Wadi Bani Awf, Wadi Hajir, Wadi Haylayn and Wadi Bani Kharus offer challenging trails for those keen on canyoning. Wadi Sahtan and the Ghubrah Bowl extend into the upper reaches of the Western Hajars, while Wadi Hoquein and Wadi Ghafir offer challenging drives through lush low lying valleys.

Salalah

Distance from Muscat

1030 km

Average drive time

12 hours by road, (1 hour by flight)

How to get there

By buses / coaches belonging to 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. This monsoon, which extends from early June to mid September, transforms the countryside into a veritable garden with tumbling waterfalls and meandering streams. The Khareef season is a good time to visit Salalah. In July and August the government plays host 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. In the surrounding countryside on the flanks of the jebels grows 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 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.

For most of the year, the unspoiled beaches of Salalah are ideal for scuba diving, canoeing, sailing, jet skiing and diving. 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 during the Khareef with its crisp unpolluted air, cool misty climate, high rolling seas and leafy ambiance.

Less than half an hour's drive from Salalah is Ain Razat, a picnic spot with springs, hills, gardens and streams. Nearby is the equally resplendent Ain Sahanawt. Seventy kilo- meters east of Salalah lies Mirbat, famous for Bin Ali's tomb (Bin Ali was revered in the early days of Islam as a sage and holy man.). Taqah, 36kms from Salalah is a picturesque, quaint village. The fort at Taqah goes back several hundred years and is well stocked with authentic decorations and appointments.

Rising high above the coast is the Jebel Samhan plateau, the highest point in Dhofar at 1800 meters. Here you can find the hanging valley of Wadi Dirbat which is impressive in full flood. Further into the jebels is Tawi Attir (the hole of the birds), a natural sink hole over 100 metres

wide and 250 metres deep. Nestled in a hidden valley is the Baobab Forest with huge bulbous trees, one tree over 2000 years old and 30 feet in diameter at its base.

To the west of Salalah are many stretches of beautiful beaches. One of the most popular of these is Mughsayl where you can find unusual blow holes in the rocky shelf close to the shore. These holes display dramatic bursts of water and foam sometimes reaching 50 feet in the air. Further to the west close to the Yemen border lies the town of Rakhyut and is a pleasant spot for picnic and swim in the ocean.

To the north of Salalah is the region known as the Nejd. This is a barren desolate area that is actually the southern fringe of the R'ub Al Khali. Here you find sweeping sand dunes and parched wadis. Lying 175 km north of Salalah is the remote village of Shisr. Here in the early nineties, with the help of satellite imagery from the space shuttle, explorers found what they believe to be the lost city of Ubar. Called by T. E. Lawrance (of Arabia) as the "Atlantis of the sands", Ubar was once considered to be the trading centre for frankincense before it was buried in the rising dunes.

Wahiba Sands

Distance from Muscat

190kms

Average drive time

2hrs

How to get there

Saloon cars and 4-wheel drives can be hired from Car rental agencies. You can reach the Wahiba Sands by saloon car but to drive into the sands requires a 4-wheel drive.

The great Wahiba sands are longitudinal dunes 200 km long and 100 km wide running south from the Eastern Hajars to the Arabian Sea. The dunes are 100-150 metres high in shades of colour 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 of 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 Bronze Age. South of Lizq are the prosperous towns of Al Mudaybi and Sinaw where you can find almost every day the bustling Bedouin souq at the centre of town.

Musandam Peninsula

Distance from Muscat

500 km

Average drive time

6 hrs by road, 45minutes by flight

How to get there

To reach Khasab, the primary town in the region, travel by car up the Batinah coast for a six-hour ride. To complete the drive to Khasab requires passing through the United Arab Emirates for which a road permit from the Oman ROP (Police) and visas (for some nationalities). Daily flights from Muscat are operated by Oman Air. No visas required.

The journey by air to the Musandam, dubbed as the "Norway of the Middle East" because of the inlets likened to Norway's fjords, provides a spectacular bird's eye view. The stark mountains of this region rise 2000 meters out of the Arabian Gulf. The patterns and textures of the mountains are altogether striking. From November to March is particularly an ideal time to visit the Musandam.

Upon your arrival you will want to book a dhow to visit Khawr Ash Shamm. Here you will find placid waters, marine life, secluded beaches and isolated outposts. A stop over at Telegraph Island is a highlight of this trip. Dhow trips can also be arranged to visit the cliff side village of Kumzar. By land you can rent a 4 wheel drive to see Khawr Najd, Jebel Harim (the highest point in Musandam) and the Acacia forest near Sal Al Ala.

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 kms off central Oman coast 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.

Jebel Akhdar

Jebel Akhdar in Arabic means "Green Mountains" and this region of the most verdant outside of Salalah and the Batinah Coast. To go 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. Points of interest include the towns of Wadi Bani Habib, Saiq and Al Ayn, where local farmers raise grapes, pomegranates, apricots and walnuts. The climate is moderate year round as the mean altitude is about 1800 metres. 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.

Contacts

http://www.rop.gov.om/services_passport2.asp

<http://www.omantourism.gov.om/>

