

Mysteries of the Arabian Peninsula: United Arab Emirates and Oman

February 19-March 6/7 and October 29-November 13/14, 2022

Optional Post-Tour Extension to the Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Feb 19/Oct 29 Day 1 Arrival in Dubai. / Arabian Courtyard hotel

Met at airport and transfer to the hotel.

Feb 20/Oct 30 Day 2 Half Day City Tour of “Old Dubai” / Arabian Courtyard hotel

Depart at 10 am for a half-day walking tour. We start with a pleasant walk through the Bastakiya Heritage Village, a charming area of narrow walkways containing restored houses and wind towers built over a century ago by wealthy pearl and textile merchants. Afterwards, we visit the fascinating underground Dubai Museum across from our hotel.

Next we walk through the old souk and cross the Dubai Creek by water taxi (abra), landing at the spice market. The souks are the place to observe local people in daily life. We recognize that some people may find shopping to be a highlight while others are not interested, therefore these walk-throughs will serve to orient those who wish to return later to shop at their leisure. The souks are open in the evening and that is also when it is most lively with local character. On the return across the creek, we wander around Shindaga waterfront.

Suggest, enjoy lunch at the one of the casual restaurants overlooking the creek just down from the water taxi stand on Bur Dubai side. There will be a wonderful variety of fresh traditional foods and salads. (Pay Direct)

In the evening, you may wish to return to Bastakiya Heritage Village or the souks independently for some shopping. Both are easy walking distance from the hotel.

Feb 21/Oct 31 Day 3 Half Day City Tour of “ New Dubai” / Arabian Courtyard hotel

Enjoy an independent morning and lunch on your own. You may wish to return to the souq or Bastakiya; or enjoy spa facilities and some relaxed time at the hotel. Suggest lunch at the hotel restaurant or in Bastakiya village (pay direct). The afternoon tour will start with pick up at 2 pm.

From here we have a glimpse of the Dubai Marina, International City and other of Dubai’s breathtaking new projects - where you will be fascinated by the amazing architecture.

Next we pass the Zabeel Palace, Shaikh Palace, (not open to public) and stop for photo opportunities at the Jumeirah Mosque.

Onward for our visit of Dubai’s future with the famous sight of Burj al Arab – everyone calls it a 7 star hotel and tallest tower hotel in the world – but in Dubai it is considered a 5* and not tallest any longer. The tallest is now JW Marriott Marquis Hotel (www.jwmarriottmarquisdubailife.com)

Our scheduled visit to go up to the observation deck of Burj Khalifa Tower (the world’s tallest tower), “At The Top” Entrance to 124th floor is 5:30 PM . The visit takes approximately 60 minutes to allow time to leisurely enjoy the unparalleled views of the Dubai skyline. Burj Khalifa Tower formerly known as Burj Dubai is the world's tallest building on earth. The height of the Khalifa Burj Tower is a little less than a Killo Meter 828 meter (2717 feet) and it is world's tallest building. The construction of this great building burj tower stated on 21 September 2004. The exterior of the structure completed on 1st October 2009. The building was inaugurated and officially opened on 4th January 2010. **There is an option to go to the 148th floor called “Sky Experience,” the extra cost is \$45.** Afterwards, we go to see the Dubai Fountain show. Set on the 30-acre Burj Khalifa Lake, the fountain shoots water jets as high as 500 ft (150 metres), equivalent to that of a 50-storey building. The fountain is 900 ft (275 metres) long and has five circles of varying sizes and two central arcs. It has been designed by California-based WET, the creators of the Fountains of Bellagio in Las Vegas.

The Dubai Fountain show is daily, with the performance repertoire including Sama Dubai; Baba Yetu, an award-winning song in Swahili; the Arab world’s top-selling dance number Shik Shak Shok; and the signature piece of world-renowned Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, Con te partiro (Time to Say Goodbye). Over 6,600 WET Superlights – the most advanced incandescent large fountain lights available today – and 25 color projectors create a visual spectrum of over 1,000 abstract attractions. The beam of light shining upward from the fountain can be seen from over 20 miles away, and will be visible from space making it the brightest spot in the Middle East, and quite possibly in the entire world.

Transfer to hotel.

Feb 22/Nov 1 Day 4 Sharjah - Ajman – Ras Al Khaimah-Kasab (Oman) / Atana Hotel Khasab

This is a very full day and we will be moving along at a pace to see as much as possible. In order to take in all there is along the way, many stops will be rather quick. We will visit three of the Emirates today.

Starting at 8 am, we drive 30 minutes to **The Emirates of Sharjah**. We pass by Sharjah Lagoon and start our journey at Cultural Square and off to Majahrah Souq with its intricate mosaics and golden dome. Our next stop is the 150-year old Bait Al Naboodah (Al Naboodah House) now known as Sharjah Heritage Museum.

We will marvel at the majestic King Faisal Mosque (currently largest mosque in the emirates) and the Pearl Monument, symbol of the UAE on our way to the Blue Souq (central market) located in the Union Square. Here more than 600 shops sell carpets, gold, silver, antiques, perfumes, clothes and many other goods. The traditional items are upstairs, so don't worry when you walk in and see contemporary western wear! If you do not wish to look at shops at all, there is a café inside to have refreshments (pay direct). Continuing, we go to the excellent Sharjah Islamic Museum. The Museum exhibits a range of important Islamic artifacts and manuscripts expressing the distinct Islamic heritage. This range contains a number of scientific and literary religious manuscripts and several collections of the arts and crafts of the Islamic civilization, including clay, pottery and glass as well as metallic handicrafts inlaid with silver, gold and brass. The museum also exhibits silver and textile handicrafts as well as ornamentation tools, jewelry and various Islamic mints, dating to both Abbaside and Omayyad eras. These mints include collections of silver Dinars and Dirhams.

Other exhibits include archaeological findings dating from the Islamic era, found in varied excavation sites in the Emirate of Sharjah. They include arms and varied samples representing styles of the civilized Islamic life for more than 1400 years. Major attractions at the museum include the Shamsi House, the Holy Kaaba Hall, the Islamic Mints Hall, the China and Pottery Hall, the Arabesque Hall, the Manuscripts hall, the Archaeology Hall, the Science Hall, and the Metallic Handicrafts Hall. The museum is huge and your guide will select a few exhibits to visit.

Next stop is Old town of Sharjah, visiting the heritage museum and the souk al torath. Refreshments can be had in the local juice shop (if you did not already have refreshments inside the Blue Souq). Drive along side the Sharjah creek where the old dhows are busy loading and off-loading the goods just as they did 100 years ago.

We continue to **Ajman** (20-30 min). Visit Ajman's enchanting museum - housed in an ancient fort - which offers intriguing insights into the local lifestyle before all of the changes brought about by oil.

We shall stop for lunch in Ajman (pay direct).

Next we shall pass through one more of the Emirates, **Ras Al Khaimah**, (45 min-1 hour drive), the northern and most fertile of the Emirates which leads up to the mountainous border with Oman's spectacularly beautiful Musandam Peninsula. We shall have a short stop in the unspoiled authentic old town to soak up the atmosphere.

We shall meet our Khasab driver at Al Hamra Hilton Hotel in Ras Al Khalmah at approx 3 pm, where you can use bathrooms and have quick refreshment if you like (soft drinks, coffee/tea; pay direct).

Continuing on, this will be an exciting drive on a winding coast-hugging road with fantastic dramatic scenery. We arrive at the Tibat Border (border between U.A.E. and Oman).

Continue to Kasab and transfer to the hotel. We aim to arrive at approximately 6 pm.

OMAN



Feb 23/Nov 2 Day 5 Khasab (Musandam Peninsula) / Atana Hotel Khasab

The Musandam Peninsula is a land of beautiful fjords (locally known as *khors*), small villages and dramatic mountain-hugging roads. The area is dubbed the 'Norway of Arabia' due to the rugged, glacier-like coastline, its towering mountains and clear, glittering khors.

Founded in the 17th century by the Portuguese, Kasab, the capital of the province, is built around a natural harbor. It is located on the Strait of Hormuz, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. The city is small, but bustling with activity especially around the old souq with a babble of different languages and the harbor with the smuggling of US cigarettes to Iran in return for goats. Piracy has been a tradition in these parts for over 200 years so no one seems to mind.

This morning, 9 am, we shall board a traditional Omani dhow for a 3.5-hour cruise around the khors (fjords). We shall pass by quaint old villages (regulations do not allow us to visit them) and see tall mountains on both sides along the way. The dhow will travel towards Musandam's longest and most spectacular fjord, often called the 'Norway of Arabia.' We shall anchor near Telegraph Island (known locally as "Khor-as-shaam"). The British laid the first telegraph cable here in 1864. It ran from India to Basra, Iraq and was manned for approximately five years. The dhow will stop for a short while, allowing you to swim or snorkel to see the exotic underwater marine life; or just relax and enjoy refreshments of tea/coffee and soft drinks while admiring breath-taking views of mountains in the distance rising to over 20,000 feet.

Return to hotel by 1 pm. Lunch on your own.

This afternoon, pick up at 2:30 pm for a city tour including a visit to Khasab Fort/Castle, Bait al-Qafl (house of the lock) – a building where Bedouins kept goods locked up during their absence. These houses are over 200 years old. Visit the village of Tawi-site of prehistoric rock carvings, and the old souq. This is a group join-in tour.

Return to the hotel. Rest of the evening at leisure. Dinner on your own.

Please Note: The sequence of activities today may be changed. The cruise and city tour in Kasab will be join-in tours, not private. City tour maximum 8 people; cruise 20-25 people.

Feb 24/Nov 3 Day 6 Fly Khasab-Muscat/ Crown Plaza

Wear your bathing suit under your clothes so you can use the pool on arrival if you like.

Current schedule subject to change. Pick up at 7:30 am and transfer to the airport for a short flight to Muscat WY 0932, depart 9:30 am, arrive 10:35 am. On arrival, transfer to hotel. Check-in is not until 2 pm so you will leave luggage with hotel security. You can enjoy the hotel facilities (pool) and have lunch on your own (pay direct). Pick up at 2 pm for afternoon tour.

Please note that these flight schedules constantly change at last minute. If this occurs, we will adjust the timing of your tour accordingly.

This afternoon's tour starts with a visit to the charming Bait al Zubair, a private museum housing traditional Omani items reflecting the country's rich heritage (closes 6 pm). The museum opened its carved wooden doors to the public in 1998. It is totally funded by its founders, the Zubair family. The museum displays the family's collection of Omani artifacts, which are considered to be the finest that is privately owned. The museum complex now consists of three separate buildings with a fourth currently under development, as well as a garden with a number of traditional features. The main museum building, Bait Al Bagh (house of gardens), was originally founded as a family home in 1914 by Sheikh Al Zubair bin Ali, who served three former Sultans as minister and advisor.

Across the street from Bait al Zubair, visit Muzna Art Gallery, modern art by Omani artists.

Then a scenic drive along the Corniche waterfront through Muttrah (the old city).

Visit the Royal Opera House Muscat, Oman's premier venue for musical arts and culture. The opera house is located in Shati Al-Qurm district of Muscat on Sultan Qaboos Street. The architectural style is Italian. It opened in 2011.
<https://www.rohmuscat.org.om/en>

Next, we will see the Al Alam Palace, an architectural marvel for both the design & location between the twin forts of Jalali & Mirani. The Jalali fort was built in 1558 AD during the presence of the Portuguese in the Sultanate. This fort was Muscat's main prison for many years, a sinister & awesome building. The Mirani Fort located at the end of the Western wall of old Muscat, facing the sea was built on top of a mountain to be a governing center. The palace and twin forts are seen from the outside only.

Culminate the day at the lively Muttrah Souq (opens about 430 pm) probably the oldest in Oman. Here you will be left on your own to wander around in the narrow lanes and admire the goods on sale & enjoy the thrill of discovery. **The driver is at your service until 7 pm. He will wait for you as you browse the bazaar. If you wish to stay longer you can easily find a taxi to return to the hotel.** Drive back to the hotel and dinner on your own.

Feb 25/Nov 4 Day 7 Muscat-Salalah / Crowne Plaza Resort

Transfer to the airport for a morning flight to Salalah, the second largest town in Oman. Current schedule Oman Air flt 901, dep 8 am, arr 940 am (**subject to change**).

Salalah, the capital of the Dhofar Province, is isolated far in the south east of the country, close to the Yemeni border. The setting here is magnificent, as Salalah faces the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean, and is backed by hills. The town is a colorful, subtropical city that owes much of its character to Oman's former territories in East Africa. It is quite a stark change from the industrious north, with its historic frankincense trade and interesting ethnic mix.

The coastal city is a traditional stronghold and birthplace of the Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The Sultan traditionally lives in Salalah rather than in Muscat, however Qaboos has bucked this trend, and has lived in Muscat since he ascended to the throne in 1970. He does, however, visit Salalah fairly regularly to meet with influential tribal and local leaders.

On arrival, transfer to the hotel. Lunch on your own at the hotel (pay direct) and enjoy hotel facilities.

Pick up at 1 pm to begin our tour of Salalah starting with a visit to the archaeological site of Al-Balid, a UNESCO cultural and heritage site. It is the site of the ancient city of Zufar. In pre-Christian times this tiny area was one of the three centers of production for one of the ancient world's most highly prized and expensive commodities, Frankincense. This was the main area in which the Frankincense tree grew. Demand for this rare product was enormous in the Mediterranean region as it was burnt in huge quantities during religious rites in temples throughout the Roman world. (Frankincense is a gum dried from the sap of a special tree that only grows in this area of Oman, Yemen and Somalia). It takes a min 90 minutes to cover all the sites and the Frankincense Museum.

A quick stop to see the footprints of Prophet Saleh's sacred camel.

Then visit to the tomb of Nabi Imran, considered the longest grave in the world. Nabi Imran was, according to Islamic and some Jewish traditions, the father of the Virgin Mary. Some believe that the Koran states that Mary's father was not Joachim, as believed by major Christian groups. They believe that the Koran states that she descended from the Imran family, a very rich and respected family in Arabia.

Returning towards Salalah town, a stop for photo opp at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in the city center. It was completed in

2001 and has a very large masjid and wonderful architectural design.

Next we'll drive by Al Husn Palace and see it from the outside. Culminate the day at the Al Hafa souq (heritage Souq), adjacent to the palace, where the best Frankincense, Dhofari traditional clothes, old style Dhofari ornaments, Omani crafts and incense burners are available. This is a good place to see how Omani hats are made.

On the way back to the hotel, drive through the Salalah Gardens (plantation area), rich in coconut, banana, papaya. We will stop to see some typical Dhofari houses with carved windows and doors.

Transfer to hotel. Dinner on your own. Enjoy the wonderful ambiance of the hotel on the beachfront.

Feb 26/Nov 5 Day 8 Salalah / Crowne Plaza Resort

Today's tour will give you a variety of the old and modern culture of the region. Depart hotel at 8:30 am.

We start with a tour of the East side, visit the traditional fishing village of Taqua, famous for the manufacture of dried sardines & its traditional old dhofari houses. We will have a walk through the neighborhood of mostly ruined homes and some under renovation. Then visit the Taqua Castle (if open). Taqua Castle is now a very nicely curated museum of the local culture and lifestyle traditions.

Onward to Khor Rawri to visit the ancient site of Sumhuram, the port at the beginning of the Incense Route. Two thousand years ago, this was one of the most important ports on the earth. It was most active between the 4th century BC and the 4th century AD and is the most important pre-Islamic settlement in the Dhofar region of Oman. Today, the city is a maze of partially excavated rooms and pathways. Archaeologists are still actively working at the site. You will see the remains of Queen Sheba's Palace on top of a small hill overlooking the Khor Rawri.

Continuing on, we go to Mirabat, a coastal town, once the capital of Dhofar and now known primarily for fishing. It was the site of the Battle of Mirabat that took place during the Dhofar rebellion in July, 1972. We visit Mirabat Castle (now a museum), wander about the area to see the old houses built in Yemeni style mud brick with hand-carved doors and windows and see the fishermen at the old port.

On the return towards town, a quick stop at Wadi Dirbat, beautiful waterfalls.

Then, we see the Queen Mother's garden and the beautiful oasis springs of Ain Razat from which the Royal family is still supplied with water and the Al Rabat Palace, (from the outside) used for official business, not the Sultan's residence.

Enjoy lunch at a traditional restaurant (pay direct).

Continue on the tour of West Salalah, driving to Mughsail Beach, which stretches over four km with high cliffs on either side. You will see the blowholes, which are worn into slabs, and during high tides you see the water bursting out of these holes. Khor Mughsail has an abundance of bird life in the season including flamingos, pelicans and storks.

We thereafter continue along the 'Hairpin-bend' road towards western border of Oman and see some of the historical 'Frankincense trees' growing in their natural habitat, deep down in the valleys, dotting the dry & craggy countryside. We'll take a short walk into the valleys to smell the 'Holy incense' amidst the scenic view of the region.

Suggest dinner at restaurant Baalbeck, (pay direct). This is one of the few places where you can sample authentic local dishes.

Please note: After feedback, we decided to delete Job's Tomb. It is a drive of 30 km to Job's Tomb, located on an isolated hilltop overlooking Salalah and literally nothing to see. It is a shallow cave with a marker stone. In religious terms, Job's Tomb is considered an important site in Dhofar. It is also known as the mosque & tomb shrine of "Nabi-Ayuob" marks the place where the remains of the Moslem Prophet possibly identified as Job of Old Testament are enshrined. I did go there and there is nothing to see!

Feb 27/Nov 6 Day 9 Lost City of Ubar & Empty Quarter

Departing at 8:30 am in 4x4 vehicles (4 people to a car), we drive across the Qara Mountains enjoying spectacular views. We make a brief stop after 1 hour at Thumrait which was famous as a Bedouin settlement. Then we proceed on a graded road crossing the huge gravel desert of Al Nejd, a remarkable area of Dhofar with its unspoiled and magical sand dunes.

It is 1.5 hour drive to the lost city of Ubar UNESCO World Heritage Site. This legendary ancient kingdom was said to have existed in one of the most inhospitable places on earth. According to myth, the desert swallowed up Ubar. Quite literally, it sank without trace -becoming the fabled Atlantis of the Sands. This once buried city, which was spotted by satellite, gives you a glimpse of the value of work carried out by a team of explorers in 1982, led by Sir Ranulph Fiennes.

After some time to walk about the site, we drive 10 min further to the daunting Empty Quarter or Rub Al Khali. Here we find high sand dunes that rise to a height of 250 metres and above. A breath taking overview of the vast desert awaits you on the top of the dunes. Picnic lunch included.

On the way back to Salalah, drive approx. 2 hours into Wadi Dawka (UNESCO World heritage site) known as the Frankincense Wadi, the biggest collection of the naturally grown Frankincense trees in the region. Experience the Frankincense and its use in the past as well as in the modern World.

Continue one hour to our Salalah hotel. We anticipate returning by 4:30 pm.

Feb 28/Nov 7 Day 10 Muscat/Quriyat/Tiwi/Fins Beach/Sur / Sur Plaza Hotel.

Wear your swimsuits under your clothes. Take some snacks from the breakfast buffet. Transfer to the airport for the flight to Muscat, WY 903, dep 0850 am, arrive 10:25 am. It may take 45 min to get to the exit.

We embark on our tour along the coastline to Sur offers vistas of the blue waters of the Gulf of Oman offset by pristine beaches. (total drive without stops is approx. 2 hours).

The adventure starts with a 1 hr 15 min drive to Quriyat, a very large fishing village between the lagoon and the sea. We will visit the lively fish market. The port of Quriyat is still guarded by a watchtower dating back to 1635.

Continue on the coastal road, following a creek or overlooking white beaches hundreds of meters long.

We will stop at a local market where you can purchase some snacks if you wish, there are no decent restaurants nearby. Arrive at Fins beach (white beach) stop for a quick swim in the clear gentle waters or just laze under the sun. Have your snacks here if hungry. The waters are so brilliantly blue and crystal clear; I found it very special to have a quick dip.

Next, we'll pass thru Tiwi, a sleepy, picturesque fishing village with pastel colored houses and brightly painted store fronts. Here is another opportunity to take in the traditional lifestyle. We can have a brief walk about the village independently.

Continue to Sur and check in to hotel and dinner at the hotel restaurant (pay direct). **Nov Tour Only:** At 8 pm we go to Ras al-Junayz to see the turtle nesting grounds.

Mar 1/Nov 8 Day 11 Sur/Wadi Bani Khalid/Wahiba Sands / Desert Camp Deluxe Tent (D)

Wear your swimsuits under your clothes. After breakfast, we'll have a tour of Sur town visiting the dhow building yard.

Next a drive a quick walk thru Bani Bi Ali Souq, then onward to Bani Bu Hassan to visit the fort. The fort was built as apart of a defensive system and was originally part of a vast protective barricade for the city. The city itself is famous for its Arabian Horses and skillful equestrians that perform on special occasions such as weddings and festivals.

Continue to Wadi Bani Khalid, which stands out like an oasis in the desert with its clear green natural spring water pool. Wadi Bani Khalid is a stark contrast to Wahiba Sands, the great desert of Oman. This lovely wadi has clear, warm waters in an idyllic setting. You may just like to take a dip in the large pool or the more active-minded can swim a bit down the narrow channel.

After a relaxing time enjoying the wadi, continue about an hour's drive to a restaurant for lunch (pay direct). Afterwards, approx. 30 minutes drive to Wahiba Sands, often described as a perfect example of a sand sea. It consists of large ranges of dunes running from North to South, some attaining a height of about 100 meters and orange in color. The Wahiba Sands is the home of the traditional Bedouin tribe who are known for their hospitality and their knowledge of the sands. Our experienced driver will take you on a drive through the undulating sand dunes to experience the thrills of dune driving. **There is a possibility of meeting one of the Bedouin families to enjoy a cup of coffee with them & to learn about their living style.**

Mar 2/Nov 9 Day 12 Wahiba Sands – Sinaw - Birkat al Mauz - Nizwa / Golden Tulip

Depart at 8 am and drive 1.5 hours to the quaint village of Sinaw. Here we'll see a true slice of traditional life. Walk around the market place and areas surrounding the town square. It is most active on Thursday, the market day, but we can still enjoy the village ambiance. We cannot plan to be here on Thursday due to other site opening days that we would miss. It will be quiet and maybe even look a bit deserted, but great people photo opps, just be aware that photographing women without permission is against the law. There is sometimes a camel trading fair in the village but cannot guarantee.

Afterwards, we depart to Birkat Al-Mawz, (approx 1.5 hr drive), a village in the Ad Dakhiliyah Region of Oman, located at the entrance of Wadi al-Muaydin on the southern rim of Jebel Akhdar and home to a restored fort called Bait al Redidah. A road and a walking route through Wadi al-Muaydin up to the Saiq Plateau start from here.

The original village of Birkat stood on the side of a hill, overlooking the surrounding valley, topped by a watchtower. Today, the watchtower is in ruins and the houses of the village are deep in mud and the ceilings have long since collapsed. This dates back to the Jebel wars, when the village was bombed and the residents evacuated.

The village stands as a testament to the traditional style of Omani houses; two stories, small alleyways leading to neighbors' houses. Stairways, twisting up narrow corridors. Palm leaves tied together and cemented with mud to create the ceilings. The fact that most of the houses still stand, to a certain degree, shows the workmanship in their construction. Many of the houses have the sun shining through their ceilings now, the odd wicker basket remains tucked into a corner of a room. Copies of torn Arabic books and scripts play home to spider webs on a forgotten shelf in a house that still has its' roof.

Thankfully, the old Falaj Al-Khatmeen (irrigation system from 500 AD) running through the village is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, allowing the village to remain protected.

A lunch stop at a local restaurant (pay direct).

Continue about 30 minutes to the Oasis city of Nizwa, in Al Hajar Mountains. Nizwa was once the capital of Julanda Dynasty in the 6th & 7th Century AD. Today it remains a popular attraction with its historical buildings & imposing fort.

We stop at the hotel to check-in and short free time to refresh (15-20 min). Then go to visit the Nizwa Fort with its enormous round tower, built in the 17th century by the great Imam Sultan Bin Seif to safeguard the route to the interiors. The fort dominates the entire area, with the town having grown around the edifice. Access to the top is only by means of a narrow, twisting staircase barred by heavy wooden doors, studded with metal. From the top of the tower one can get a bird's eye view of the Nizwa city. (closes 4 pm).

From here it is a short walk to the souq, renowned for intricately hand-carved Khanjar and ornately designed silver jewelry. Evening hours 4-10 pm.

Transfer to the hotel. Evening at leisure.

Mar 3/Nov 10, Day 13: Nizwa - Al Hamra –Misfah - Bahla – Jabrin- Nizwa / Golden Tulip (B)

We depart at 8 am driving approx. 45 min to the 400 year old walled town Al Hamra at the foot of the Hajar Mountains. The mornings are best time to catch local activity. All the villages go dead between 1-4 pm.

Next we stop at Bait Al Safa, an old house converted into a museum. We will have an opportunity to interact with local people and enjoy dates and Arabic coffee.

Onward to the mountain village of Misfah al Abreyeen. The village boasts amazing agricultural terraces, beautiful alleys, and old mud houses with palm frond roofs built on top of solid rocks. We will walk into the village and wander about. The houses cling to the rocks, this looks precarious but it has been there for centuries. Many villagers of Misfat Al Abriyeen rely on the agricultural terraces for their livelihood, where bananas, pomegranates, papayas, mangoes, citrus trees and of course palm trees are grown. Those terraces along the mountain slopes are watered through an intricate *falaj* system that has been carved through the hard rocks of the mountain, and is supplied from a spring source. We will come to a view point looking down at the Falaj and water pools which are still used for washing. Lunch in local restaurant (pay direct).

Returning towards Nizwa, we stop after 35 minute drive, at Bahla Fort, one of four historic fortresses situated at the foot of the Djebel Akhdar highlands and Oman's only UNESCO-listed fort added in 1987. The complex is an outstanding example of an Islamic, medieval era oasis settlement in sand color that blends into the arid landscapes of the surrounding mountains. Visiting Bahla Fort is stepping into a labyrinth of settlements, alcoves, rooms and defensive elements of pre-gunpowder Oman.

After over two decades of restoration, Bahla Fort finally re-opened to the public in 2012 albeit without the audio guide of Jabrin Castle or the exhibits of Nizwa Fort. Bahla Fort complex is made of three elements: the fort, a citadel oasis and an ancient city wall that spreads over 13 kilometres. The complex is believed to have been built by the Banu Nebhan tribe between the 12th and 15th centuries when they occupied this region of Oman and made Bahla their capital. It was subsequently expanded by the tribes that followed adding to the grandiosity of the fort. The construction is made of mud and straw bricks cooked at very high temperatures and built contouring a rocky hill so the mountain's rocks are often part of the constructions, the rooms, the floor or the walls of some of the spaces. It is incredible to think that the mud has survived so many centuries.

Continue to Jabreen (Jabrin) Fort by 3:30 pm (closes at 4 pm), to visit the castle, the finest of Oman's castles, the best preserved and most whimsical. Built in the late 17th century, this castle has extremely well planned layouts with rooms for the wali, the ladies room, the kitchen, the majlis. There are elaborately painted ceilings with original floral and Islamic motifs in many rooms, a latticed-window courtyard and hidden rooms such as the burial chambers. An excellent view from the top of the castle.

Transfer to the hotel. Evening at leisure.

Mar 4/Nov 11 Day 14: Al Ain-Abu Dhabi / Holiday Inn Abu Dhabi

Depart at 8 am and drive 3 hours to Al Ain (Oman side of the border). We plan to arrive approx 11 am. We walk through the border checkpoint and meet our UAE guide.

A tour of Al Ain includes a visit to the national museum (which boasts an impressive archaeological section), Al Ain Palace Museum (the former house of the late Sheikh Zayed the founder of United Arab Emirates), Souk Al Mawashi, (animal market) and the camel market.

Next, visit Hili Archaeological Park, 10 km outside of Al Ain (approx. 30 min drive). Most of the monuments are of the Umm an-Nar period which dates from about 2500 BCE to 2000 BCE and is named after the island near Abu Dhabi on which remains of this important culture were first discovered. Its' center piece is Hili Grand Tomb dating to about 2000 BCE. Built in a circular form with a diameter of up to 12 metres, and approximately 4 meters high, the tomb was used for the burial of people from the surrounding settlements. The tomb has two entrances, which are decorated with beautiful engraved reliefs portraying human and animal figurines. Many other similar tombs are found throughout the area of Hili. In the future an archaeological trail will permit tourists to visit these sites and learn more about the Umm an-Nar culture.

In addition to tombs, there are several Bronze Age forts and settlements within and just outside Hili Archaeological Park. One of these, Hili 8, revealed evidence for the earliest agriculture in the UAE dating to about 5000 years ago. Artefacts from these sites can be seen in Al Ain National Museum. You will visit as much as possible, time-permitting.

Continue to Abu Dhabi (approx. 1 hr 45 min drive). We anticipate arrival approx. 6-6:30 pm.

Transfer to hotel. Dinner on your own. The hotel has five restaurants as well as casual light meals at the rooftop lounge.

Mar 5/Nov 12 Day 15: Abu Dhabi Tour / Holiday Inn Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi, the capital city of the United Arab Emirates, is situated on a small peninsula surrounded by a cluster of islands. The city was founded in 1761 by a Sheikh (chieftain) of the nomadic Bani Yas tribe.

This morning we depart the hotel at 9 am for a visit to the Falcon Hospital (30-45 min drive) to experience the fascinating world of falcons and falconry. The tour provides a deep insight into the world of these majestic birds, the history of falconry as well as the life of falcons in modern times. We will have an opportunity to come closer to falcons than ever possible in the outside world. Tour starts at 10 am and duration is 1.5 hrs <http://www.falconhospital.com/>

On the way back to city center, we drive past the stunning Grand Mosque, officially known as the Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Mosque. It's the largest mosque in the UAE, clad in luxury marble and gold, it is designed to accommodate more than 40,000 worshippers.

Afterwards, stop for lunch at local restaurant (pay direct).

We visit the Heritage village that provides a glimpse into the traditional lifestyle, before oil was first found. Run by the Emirates Heritage Club, this is a reconstruction of a desert village with crafts demonstrations and monthly cultural events. <https://visitabudhabi.ae/en/see.and.do/attractions.and.landmarks/cultural.attractions/heritage.village.aspx>

Afterwards, drive past the Emirates Palace, an enchanting landmark. The world-famous hotel boasts 302 Grand rooms and 92 magnificent suites, each combining the ultimate in luxury, with state of the art technology. Emirates Palace's newest al fresco café just opened in 2018. Located at the base of the staircase beside the regal fountain, diners may partake of the signature 24K gold Palace Cappuccino or choose from an array of sweet treats, including our 24K dipped soft serve ice cream cone, aptly named Ice Gold. \$28 minimum charge. \$40 gets you one coffee with 24 k gold and a piece of cake. If anyone wants to experience this we need to make reservations in advance. You can be dropped off and take taxi back to hotel or if everyone wants to do this we can all return to hotel by our car. The café is open to visitors (non-hotel guests) from 1-5 pm only.

Mar 6/Nov 13 Day 16: Abu Dhabi Tour – Drive to Dubai / Millenium Hotel, near airport.

We depart the hotel at 9 am and start the day with a drive through Saadiyat Island. The Saadiyat Cultural District is a concentrated area of museums and cultural programs.

We start with a visit to The Louvre Abu Dhabi <https://www.louvreabudhabi.ae/>

The Louvre Abu Dhabi is a new cultural beacon, bringing different cultures together to shine new light on the shared stories of humanity. This means focusing on stories of human creativity that transcend individual cultures or civilizations, times or places. Its' dazzling architecture combines French design with Arabic heritage.

We shall stop for an early lunch at a local restaurant (pay direct).

Then drive through Yas Island passing the world famous Yas Marina Circuit, home of the Formula 1 Race, and Ferrari World (No stop. We can only have a look only at a distance). Overall a wonderful encounter with a bustling metropolis, which still maintains the charms of a bygone era.

We will finish touring by about 1 pm.

If Joining Post-Tour to Gulf States: Transfer to Abu Dhabi airport for flight to Bahrain.

Those departing, continue the drive to Dubai (approx 1.5-2 hrs/can be longer due to traffic congestion). Transfer to hotel by airport. During check-in, ask at reception to book your departure transfer by complimentary shuttle bus (departs every 45 minutes)

The reason we set-up for you to transfer by hotel shuttle rather than including a private transfer in the tour price is because people have different departure times so we would have had to add in the price of each transfer individually which is a higher cost than taking the hotel shuttle transfer. **However if you prefer the private transfer**, let us know a minimum of 1 month prior to the start of the tour and we will book it for you and add the cost to your invoice (approx. \$45).

Mar 7/Nov 14 Day 17: Depart

Check out by 12 noon latest. Take hotel shuttle to airport for departure.

**“We reserve the right to change hotels, restaurants
or the order of activities, cities visited or sites if/as needed.”**

PRICES 2021 based on min 4 people. \$5382. Single Room: \$1395. **PRICES 2022 TBA.**

Plus Flights (estimate): Khasab-Muscat, Muscat-Salalah-Muscat: \$304.

Inclusions: UAE: accommodation, daily breakfasts, airport transfers on day one, ac land transport (Hiace Van 2-4 people/9 seats or Coaster 6-10 people/18 seats), accompanying escort, entrance fees.

OMAN: accommodation; daily breakfast, one dinner, arrival and departure transfers and transport within Oman by ac vehicle Nissan or Toyota 4WD, local guides in Khasab and Salalah, accompanying guide Day 7 to Day 11, entrance fees

Not Included: international flight, flights within the tour, visa fees (if any), departure taxes (if any), departure airport transfer, trip cancellation/travel insurance, tips, meals not listed.

Hotels – based on availability:

UAE

Dubai, 2 nights: Arabian Courtyard Hotel <http://arabiancourtyard.com/>

centrally located in Bur Dubai, across from the Dubai Museum and walking distance to the Dubai Creek, Bastakiya Heritage Area, Souk Al Kabeer (Meena Bazaar), Textile Market and Port Rashid. Elegantly furnished rooms in traditional Arabic theme, a variety of dining options, fully equipped fitness center and Wellness Spa.

Abu Dhabi, 1 night: Holiday Inn Abu Dhabi 4* <https://www.holidayinn.com/hotels/us/en/abu-dhabi/auhar/hoteldetail?>

a modern hotel in the middle of Abu Dhabi; wireless internet in rooms, fitness center, heated outdoor pool, Lebanese cuisine at their Leon Tree Restaurant; international cuisine at Silk Route Café. 15 minutes from airport.

Dubai: The last night Millennium hotel 4* near airport. <https://www.millenniumhotels.com/en/dubai/millennium-airport-hotel-dubai/>

OMAN

Kasab: 2 nights. Atana Hotel (formerly Golden Tulip), 4* deluxe rooms. <http://www.atanahotels.com/>

Perched on a rock face with views of the Musandam Shoreline, each room is elegantly furnished with a private terrace or balcony.

Muscat: 1 night. Crowne Plaza, standard sea view rooms.

<http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/crowneplaza/hotels/us/en/muscat/mschc/hoteldetail>

Magnificently nestled at the tip of Qurum Beach with breathtaking panoramic views of the Gulf of Oman. Set in 10 acres of lush landscaped gardens within the prestigious "Qurum Heights" area of Muscat, facilities include Club Room & Lounge, WiFi, business centre, floodlit tennis courts, swimming pool, squash courts, a fully equipped fitness centre and a private beach. The hotel is ideally located 5 minute drive from the shopping area of Qurum, 15 minutes from Muttrah Souk and 10 minutes from the diplomatic district.

Salalah: 2 nights, Crowne Plaza resort, standard sea view rooms.

<http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/crowneplaza/hotels/us/en/salalah/sllss/hoteldetail>

42 acres of lush landscaped gardens, a private beach and 3 interconnecting swimming pools.

Sur: 1 night. Sur Plaza Hotel, standard rooms. <http://surplazahotel.com/>
Comfortable 3-star located in the picturesque city of Sur, 300 km from Muscat. It offers world-class facilities to complement traditional Omani hospitality. The hotel is located close to Turtle Beach at Ras-al-Hadd.

Wabiba Sands: 1 night. Desert Nights Camp, Deluxe tents, private bathroom <http://www.omanhotels.com/desertnightscamp/>

Nizwa: 2 nights. Golden Tulip, standard rooms. <http://www.goldentulipnizwa.com> 3/4 star/best available - remarkably nice spacious rooms, nice landscaping, good restaurant and friendly service. Set in the heart of the historic charming city of Nizwa in the shadow of the majestic Jabel Akhdar range of mountains. Facilities: swimming pool, gym and steam room; satellite TV. International cuisine.

NOTES: Sequence of activities within a day are subject to change.

Standard check-in time is 2 pm and check out time is 12 noon. Early check-in is subject to availability on the day of arrival. To guarantee a room for very early morning arrivals you must pay for the night prior. Late check-out is also subject to availability and may require extra costs.

If group size is less than the minimum stated, a supplement fee applies.

The Department of Tourism of Dubai has initiated a new fee that tourists must pay directly to the hotels. The cost is based on the hotel category. For Arabian Courtyard Hotel the fee is AED 15.00 per night, per room (approx US\$5). You can pay by credit card or cash. We are not permitted to include this cost in the tour price. This fee amount is subject to change.

The tour does not include meals except dinner at Wahiba Sands at the Desert Camp. When meals are included they are often larger meals at upscale restaurants and they figure in a cost that is higher than what you would pay directly. We include meals in a group for convenience of not having to have clients attempt to split the bill or ask for separate checks, however since this tour typically draws only 4-6 people we felt it is to your advantage to pay directly. This also gives you more flexibility and freedom of choice selecting from a menu.

In the itinerary, we do mention stops for lunch at local restaurants when we are out touring all day. These stops are strategically placed in the itinerary where we know there are quality restaurants. If you do not eat during this planned stop, there may not be other acceptable restaurant options, or sometimes no other restaurants nearby, later in the day. Please do not tell your guide you do not want to stop for lunch at the planned time. The guide and driver also need to have a lunch break.

Opening hours and days of all places listed subject to change without notice. Certain forts are often closed temporarily for renovations on a regular basis. **Currently, all the highlights on the tour are open for the dates planned. However, if the dates end up falling during public holidays or emergency, then the Oman Government could close these sites without prior notice.**

Weather in February and November: pleasant warm days, mildly cool evenings in the mountains.

Optional Post-Tour Extension to Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. Request Details if interested.