

ASIA · DESERT · MOUNTAINS · HIKING · ROAD TRIPS · BEACHES · HISTORY



Oman

Oman is the Arabia of forts on rocky outcrops, date-palm oases, dunes and mountain canyons, with very little high-rise excess. Camping in the Wahiba Sands brings total desert silence, and the canyon below Jebel Shams has earned the nickname 'Grand Canyon of Arabia'. It is a calmer, more traditional alternative to its flashier Gulf neighbours.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Oman and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 22 July 2026.

 CAPITAL Muscat	 CURRENCY Omani rial (OMR) £1 ≈ OMR 0.51	 LANGUAGE Arabic, English	 BEST TIME Oct–Apr
 DAILY BUDGET £55–£260 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type G, C 240V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 7h 10m direct ~£400–£800 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+4 standard time

Oman is made for a road trip. Most first visits are a one- or two-week loop from Muscat: the capital's Grand Mosque, Mutrah souq and Royal Opera House; inland over the Hajar Mountains to Nizwa's fort, the terraced villages of Jebel Akhdar and the canyon rim at Jebel Shams; then east to a night in the Wahiba Sands and back along the coast via swimmable wadis such as Wadi Shab and the turtle beach at Ras al-Jinz. With more time, fly south to Salalah, green during the summer monsoon, or north to the fjords of the Musandam peninsula.

Oman feels more traditional than its neighbours: men wear the dishdasha and, on formal occasions, the curved khanjar dagger, buildings stay low, and the welcome is unhurried. It is not cheap, though. Hotels are pricey, and a hire car is close to essential because public transport barely reaches the interior. Winter brings perfect weather and most visitors, while from May to September the north is brutally hot. It suits independent travellers who enjoy driving, hiking, camping and history. Most people are surprised by how empty the roads and wadis are, and by how often they are offered kahwa and dates.

Top 5 highlights

1

SACRED SITE

Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque

Muscat's showpiece mosque, completed in 2001, with a vast hand-woven Persian carpet made as a single piece and a huge crystal chandelier. Non-Muslims can visit on Saturday to Thursday mornings; cover arms and legs, and women need a headscarf.

2

HISTORY

Nizwa Fort and souq

The old capital of the interior, dominated by the 17th-century fort's great round tower. Arrive early on Friday for the goat auction, browse the souq's silver khanjars, pottery and dates, and visit nearby Bahla's UNESCO-listed fort.

3

ADVENTURE

Jebel Shams

Oman's highest mountain, at around 3,000m, towers over Wadi Ghul, the 'Grand Canyon of Arabia'. Hike the Balcony Walk (W6) along the canyon wall to the abandoned village of As Sab, and camp on the rim for cold, starry nights.

4

NATURE

Wahiba Sands

Also called the Sharqiya Sands, this sea of orange dunes, some up to 100m high, stretches south from Bidiyah. Stay at a desert camp, ride a camel at sunset, and leave dune driving to experienced local guides.

5

NATURE

Wadi Shab

A short boat crossing, then about an hour's walk up a gorge of date palms and turquoise pools, ending with a swim through a narrow gap into a cave with a waterfall. Bring water shoes, and stay away after rain.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Muscat

≈ 1.4 million people

A long, low-rise capital strung between mountains and sea; spend two days on the Grand Mosque, Mutrah's corniche and souq, the Royal Opera House and Old Muscat's palace waterfront.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Salalah

≈ 280,000 people

Dhofar's capital feels a world away from the north, with banana groves, frankincense heritage sites and long beaches, and misty green hills during the summer khareef monsoon.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Sohar

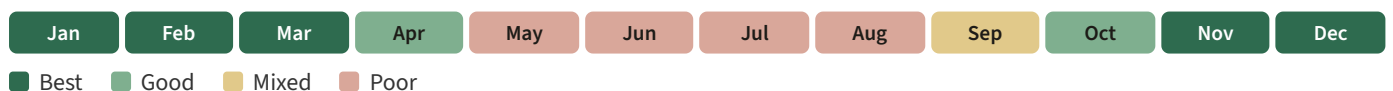
≈ 155,000 people

An industrial port on the Batinah coast with a whitewashed fort and a claim to be Sinbad's home town; mostly a stop between Muscat and the UAE border.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

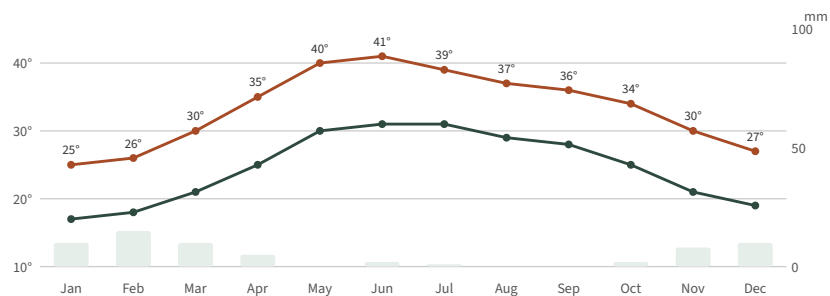
When to go to Oman

Best time: **Oct–Apr**.



Average climate in Muscat

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan	Muscat Nights The capital's winter festival, staged in parks around Muscat with light shows, food stalls, concerts and traditional crafts; it runs for several weeks, with dates that shift each year but usually include January.
Jul–Aug	Khareef season in Dhofar When the summer monsoon turns Salalah's hills green, Gulf visitors pour in for the cool drizzle and waterfalls, and a festival programme of markets, concerts and heritage shows.

How much does Oman cost?

SHOESTRING £55 per person / day ≈ OMR 28.26 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £120 per person / day ≈ OMR 61.66 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £260 per person / day ≈ OMR 134 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Shuwa Oman's festive dish: lamb or goat rubbed with spices, wrapped in palm or banana leaves and slow-cooked for up to two days in an underground sand oven.	Omani halwa A sticky, glossy sweet of sugar, ghee, rosewater, saffron and nuts, served with bitter cardamom-scented kahwa coffee whenever guests arrive.	Mashuai A whole kingfish spit-roasted and served with lemon-scented rice, a long-standing favourite at Muscat's seaside restaurants.
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Getting around

Hiring a car is by far the best way to see Oman: roads are excellent, signs are bilingual and fuel is cheap. A 4x4 helps on the final climb to Jebel Shams and on dirt tracks. Mwasalat buses link Muscat with Nizwa, Sur and Salalah. Taxis are plentiful in Muscat; agree the fare first or use a local taxi app. Oman Air and SalamAir fly to Salalah and Khasab.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE   G C 240V — UK plugs fit	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 9999 (ambulance, fire, police) Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +968	TIME ZONE UTC+4 (standard time)
TAP WATER Varies — bottled or filtered is safer	DRIVING On the right
TIPPING Not obligatory. Leave around 10% in restaurants without a service charge, and tip drivers, desert-camp staff and guides a few rials for good service.	

ETIQUETTE

Dress modestly away from hotel pools, covering shoulders and knees. Ask before photographing people, especially women, accept coffee and dates when offered, and use your right hand.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Muscat International Airport (MCT), Muscat; Salalah International Airport (SLL), Salalah

Visas & entry for Oman

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Oman for up to 14 days without a visa.

If you overstay or do not extend your visa or residency, the Omani authorities may fine and detain you. Fines can be up to 10 Omani rials a day, with a total maximum fine of 500 rials.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Dengue Hepatitis B Rabies Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Oman

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 20 Nov 2026	National Day
Sat 21 Nov 2026	National Day
Tue 5 Jan 2027	Isra' and Mi'raj (date may shift)
Mon 11 Jan 2027	Sultan's Accession Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)

Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sat 15 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 18 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Arabic

ENGLISH	ARABIC	SAY IT
Hello	السلام عليكم	<i>as-sa-LAAM a-LAY-kum</i>
Thank you	شكراً	<i>SHOOK-ran</i>
Please	من فضلك	<i>min FAD-lak</i>
Excuse me	لو سمحت	<i>law sa-MAHT</i>
How much is this?	بكم هذا؟	<i>BI-kam HAA-dha</i>

Know before you go

- Never drive or camp in a wadi bed when rain is forecast, even in distant mountains: flash floods arrive quickly and regularly sweep away vehicles.
- Hire a 4x4 if you plan to tackle steep gravel roads, but book a guide for dune driving, and check your rental insurance, which often excludes off-road damage.
- Carry some cash for village shops, remote fuel stations and the Nizwa souq; cards are widely accepted in Muscat but much less so in the interior.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.