

Oman (Bradt Travel Guides)

Diana Darke

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Oman is not merely a desert. While it has the classic sand seas - Wahiba Sands - home to the nomadic Bedouin and their camels, this sultanate also boasts lush monsoon-soaked valleys near Salalah, mountain villages surrounded by green terraced fields of fruit trees and rose bushes, and the reef-fringed Daymaniyat Islands. With such a varied wilderness there is huge scope for adventure.

Tourism has developed over the last few years and there is an increased emphasis on high-end visitors, with new luxury spas in hotels like The Chedi, The Wave, and the Four Seasons in Muscat, and the new Marriott in Salalah. Large international cruise ships now call for a night or two at Muttrah/Muscat harbour and at Salalah in the south. Eco-awareness is on the rise, with many bigger hotels using waste water for garden irrigation and eco-luxe tents are growing in popularity for desert and mountain adventure tours. The first boutique hotels are opening for small-scale tourism to the uninhabited historic villages, particularly in the mountains, where the high altitude gives cooler climates and greener landscapes with village terracing for agriculture.

Oman is increasingly perceived as a high-end cultural destination. The new Opera House has opened, directly supported by the Sultan, with top-notch international performers like Placido Domingo. New sections in this edition include advice on property buying, since Omani law changed to allow expatriates to buy, explaining the rules and regulations. There is also a detailed overview of language schools teaching Arabic, not found in other guides.

With advice on cultural etiquette, basic Arabic phrases and political history - as well as full practical information on where to stay and eat, and what to see and do - this fully updated edition remains the essential guide for travellers looking to discover the real Oman.



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