



ACADEMY TRAVEL

TAILORED
SMALL GROUP
JOURNEYS

OMAN

EXPLORING THE FRANKINCENSE ROUTE

Khasab Fort

OVERVIEW

On the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula lies Oman, the ancient land of Sheba and origin of the Incense Trail. A peaceful sultanate, it is known best for its unspoilt natural scenery, rich in high, rugged mountains, wadis, expansive sand deserts and oases ringed with palms.

This 16-day tour, led by archaeologist Dr John Tidmarsh, begins at the northern tip in the Musandam Peninsula, known as the Fjords of Arabia. As part of our exploration, we'll cruise these fjords in a traditional wooden boat known as a dhow, admiring the striated mountain cliffs that plunge into the clear, dolphin-filled waters of the Gulf. Our next destination of central Oman offers spectacular mountain ranges and desert vistas dotted with palm groves and hidden oases. Its traditional mudbrick villages with their imposing tribal forts and cool souqs retain much of the flavour of Old Arabia.

Finally, we head south into the near-tropical climate of Salalah, whose monsoon season creates a fertile strip of abundant tropical fruits and exotic plants. An optional three-day, post-tour extension to Doha, the burgeoning capital of Qatar, is also available with this tour.



TOUR LEADER

Dr John Tidmarsh is an archaeologist who specializes in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. He has directed many excavations for the University of Sydney and other organisations.

TOUR DATES

January 23 - February 7, 2025

TOUR PRICE

\$13,350 per person, twin share
\$1,480 single supplement

TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1,000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **16** in group

ITINERARY

Dubai (1 night), Khasab (3 nights), Muscat (2 nights), Nizwa (2 nights), Jebel Akhdar (1 night), Wahiba Sands (1 night), Ras Al Jinz (1 night), Salalah (4 nights)

INCLUSIONS

15 nights' accommodation in centrally located 4 and 5-star hotels. All breakfasts, 11 lunches and 13 dinners. Services of an expert tour leader and an experienced tour manager throughout. Internal Economy flights as indicated, all ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Start & Finish

The tour starts at 4.00pm on Thursday 23 January, at the Hilton Garden Inn Dubai Al Muraqabat, Dubai. The tour ends at 4.00pm on Friday 7 February, on arrival to Dubai International Airport.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D.

Thursday 23 January

Arrive Dubai

Depending on the time of your arrival in Dubai, you'll have the afternoon at leisure to explore this unique city. In the evening we gather for introductions and a welcome dinner. Overnight Dubai (D)

Friday 24 January

To Khasab

This morning we head from Dubai to the Musandam Peninsula, a remote Oman region with a starkly different feel and pace from flashy, modern Dubai. There we cross the border into Oman and continue first to the port city of Khasab, our base for the next three nights. The city sits at the far northern end of the peninsula in a narrow plain squeezed in between the mountains – one of the few sizeable areas of flat coastal real estate in the entire peninsula. We arrive at the hotel in time for lunch, and after time to settle in, John will provide an introductory lecture, followed by an afternoon at leisure to take in the rugged coastal surroundings. Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant. Overnight Khasab (B, L, D)

Saturday 25 January

Khasab

Our day begins with a visit to the Khasab Fort, with its distinct crenellations. First built by the Portuguese during their occupation in the 17th-century, the castle was redesigned by the Omanis to serve its present-day function as a museum and open-air showcase for traditional boats, houses and other aspects of Omani culture. After lunch, we'll drive a few kilometres to the small village of Wadi Tawi, home to a collection of beautiful petroglyphs. In fallen boulders we find carvings of warriors, ships and different kinds of animals. We then buckle in for a trek in a 4-wheel drive vehicle up Jebel Harim, the highest mountain in Musandam, to enjoy some breathtaking panoramas with views back to Khasab and onwards towards Dibba. Returning to the hotel, the evening is at leisure before we meet for dinner. Overnight Khasab (B, L, D)

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Musandam Peninsula Fjords

Cruise the clear waters of these unique desert 'Fjords of Arabia' by traditional wooden dhow boat, surrounded by striated red cliffs.

Muscat

Explore the capital city of Oman, a heady mix of ancient landmarks, museums, palaces, and ports, and features the impressive sandstone Grand Mosque.

Nizwa

Discover this ancient city at the head of the Wadi Samail, which traditionally controlled the main route from the coast to the interior. Its fort is known as one of the most beautiful in Oman.

Wahiba Sands

After a traditional dinner of local cuisine, spend the night under the desert stars in a Bedouin tent amidst an ocean of towering pale gold sand dunes.

Salalah

With its white beaches, frankincense plantations and great Graeco-Roman and Islamic maritime trading ports, experience this tropical city that also offers an entrance to the 'lost' city of Ubar.



Birkat Al-Mawz

Sunday 26 January Musandam Peninsula Cruise

Today we depart for a full day cruise of the Musandam Peninsula fjords, the only desert fjords on earth. From our dhow, a traditional masted wooden boat, we enjoy dramatic views of red striated cliffs plunging into green water, pass by Telegraph Island and Seebi Island, and explore small fishing villages along the coast, getting a sense of Omani rural life. There's even a chance of seeing dolphins, rays and colourful fish. Lunch and other refreshments will be served onboard the dhow, buffet style. Overnight Khasab (B, L, D)

Monday 27 January To Muscat

This morning we fly from the Khasab airport to Muscat, Oman's capital. Located on the Gulf of Oman, the city is surrounded by mountains and desert, and combines a dizzying mix of ancient landmarks and contemporary structures, modern shopping and traditional souks. Upon arrival, we enjoy an afternoon lecture before gathering for a traditional dinner hosted by a local family. Overnight Muscat (B, D)

Tuesday 28 January Muscat

Today we'll have a full-day orientation tour of Muscat. We begin with a visit to Seeb and its bustling early-morning fish market. The impressive sandstone Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque features a 50m dome and a 91.5m minaret, along with a three-story library and a 4200m-wide Persian prayer rug. Next is the Omani National Museum, billed as Oman's flagship cultural institution, which showcases Oman's heritage from the first evidence of human occupation through the present. Muscat Harbour houses the Al Alam Palace with its striking blue and gold façade, used as a ceremonial palace by Sultan Qaboos. We'll wrap up with a visit to the Port of Muttrah, one of Oman's main commercial ports and a centre of commerce, known for the huge Al Dhalam ("Darkness") Souk, so named for the myriad of alleys lined with shops and stalls that block the sun during the day. Returning to the hotel in the late afternoon, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Muscat (B, L)

Wednesday 29 January To Nizwa

This morning we head inland to the ancient city of Nizwa, situated at the base of the Western Hajar Mountains on a plain with seasonal rivers and date plantations. Oman's capital in the 6th and 7th centuries, Nizwa is one of the ancient homes of Islam and a former centre of commerce, art and education. We first explore the superbly restored 17th-century fort and the old village packed tightly around the fortress walls, before exploring the souq, famous for silver work. In the afternoon we'll visit the two-million-year-old Al Hoota Caves, which extend over 4.5km under Jabal Shams, Oman's highest mountain. Likely used over the centuries as an escape route and hiding spot, the cave system contains four lakes and is home to a unique ecosystem with



Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque



Nizwa Fort



Wahiba Sands

several rare animals, including the ‘Bu Naseh,’ or blind transparent fish. There will be a talk at the hotel before dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight Nizwa (B, D)

Thursday 30 January

Nizwa Surrounds

We venture into the surrounds of Nizwa today, beginning with the Tanuf Ruins, the remains of a mud-brick village destroyed and abandoned during the Jabal Akhdar Wars in the 1950s. Set against the backdrop of the Al Hajar Mountains, it makes for prime photographic moments. Likewise, the 300-year-old mud-brick village of Misfah, tucked against the mountain summit of Jebel Shams, offers stunning natural views of the surrounding forested plains. We then visit nearby Jabrin Castle, an important centre of learning when it was built in 1675 by Imam Bil-Arab Bin Sultan. Known for its elaborately painted ceilings, it has a date store and many hidden corridors and rooms to explore. Finally, we stop by the villages of Al Ain and Bat, renowned for their well-preserved 4000-year-old beehive tombs. Returning to the hotel, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Nizwa (B, L)

Friday 31 January

To Jebel Akhdar

Departing Nizwa this morning, our destination is Jebel Akhdar, stopping on the way by the village of Birkat al Mauz. Along with two sets of ruins, the site has banana and palm plantations and a UNESCO World Heritage-recognized traditional falaj irrigation system, all set against a mountainous backdrop. Our trip continues through the mountain passes to Jebel Akhdar, one of the highest peaks in Oman. 2,000m above sea level, this limestone mountain is famous for its terraced pomegranate, apricot, and rose orchards as well as its labyrinth of wadis. After time to freshen up on arrival, there is a lecture in the hotel before we gather for dinner. Overnight Jebel Akhdar (B, L, D)

Saturday 1 February

To Wahiba Sands

From Jebel Akhdar we begin our descent into the heart of Oman, driving through the impressive trees and well-preserved ruins of Wadi Bani Habib toward the vast desert of Wahiba Sands, some 12,000 square kilometres of rolling dunes of red sand. Named for the Bani Wahiba tribe of the region, the towering piles of sand will shift between rich yellow and coppery orange when the sun is at lower angles. After enjoying a traditional dinner of local cuisine, we spend our desert night in the traditional way, under the stars in a Bedouin tent. Overnight Wahiba Sands (B, D)

Sunday 2 February

To Ras Al Jinz

Our day begins with a walk through the desert, where we live out our Lawrence of Arabia dreams gazing into the vast deserts towering dunes. We then make our way to the beautiful oasis of Wadi Bani Khalid, whose translucent blue waters are fringed with date palms and ideal for a swim. Our day continues on to



Wadi Bani Khalid



Khor Rawri

Ras al Jinz, a fishing village located at the easternmost point of the Arabian Peninsula. This important archaeological site has a continuous occupational history from the 6th millennium BCE onwards and is one of the foremost Bronze Age settlements in the region, providing a well-documented sequence of over 500 years throughout the Umm an-Nar period (ca. 2500-2000 BCE). Excavations have unearthed several important relics, most notably Oman's first wooden boat and the peninsula's oldest incense burner. It is best known, however, as a nesting site for green turtles and is home to a turtle reserve. Tonight there is a pre-dinner lecture at the hotel. Overnight Ras Al Jinz (B, L, D)

Monday 3 February To Salalah

Our journey continues today as we drive along the spectacularly rugged coast to Sur, an important medieval port city still famous for its shipyards that produce traditional wooden vessels. We continue to Qalhat, visited often by Marco Polo and merchant ships from India. Among the scattered ruins is the Mausoleum of Bibi Miriam, with its beautifully proportioned exterior and fine interior stucco work. Then it's on to Muscat, where we take a flight to our next destination, Salalah, nestled between the spectacular crescent of the Dhofar Mountains on one side and the blue waters of the Arabian Sea on the other. After time to freshen up on arrival, there is a lecture in the hotel before we gather for dinner. Overnight Salalah (B, L, D)

Tuesday 4 February Salalah

Salalah, the third-largest city in Oman, is known best for its June-September monsoon (khareef) season, which turns this desert region lush almost tropical, and allows for banana and coconut gardens throughout the city. Even without monsoon season, though, there's still plenty to explore. Today we begin at the newly excavated ruins of Khor Rawri, one of the main centres for trade in frankincense, spices and precious stones. A stroll through the quaint fishing village of Taqa concludes with a visit to Taqah Castle, a 19th-century fort renovated as a museum showcasing exhibits of weapons, cookware, and more from the traditional Omani way of life. We then take a break and enjoy a picnic lunch at the lush retreat of Ain Razat at the foot of the Qara Mountains with its gardens, streams and hills. The day concludes with a visit to the beach of Mughsail, popular for its blowholes in the rocky shelf close to shore. Returning to the hotel, the evening is at leisure before we meet for dinner. Overnight Salalah (B, L, D)

Wednesday 5 February Dhofari Frankincense Plantations

In contrast to the lush coastal plain, the region on the other side of the Dhofari Mountains is arid high plateau and the perfect habitat for Oman's famous frankincense trees. It's here we find a rare species of frankincense that thrives in the isolated wadis and offers the highest quality of Oman's most famous export. Frankincense is a daily part of Omani life and the best quality

HOTELS

Hotels have been selected principally for their central location. All hotels are excellent four and five-star standard.

Dubai, Hilton Garden Inn Dubai Al Muraqabat

(1 night)

Khasab, Atana Khasab

(3 nights)

Muscat, Al Falaj Hotel

(2 nights)

Nizwa, Falaj Daris Hotel

(2 nights)

Jebel Akhdar, Sama Jabal

Al Akhdar

(1 night)

Wahiba Sands, Thousand Nights Camp

(1 night)

Ras Al Jinz, Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve

(1 night)

Salalah, Crowne Plaza Resort

(4 nights)

WEATHER

January is perhaps the best month to tour Oman. The temperatures have eased off from the summer swelter, while still good for swimming. The average high is 25°C, with average low of 17°C in evenings and early mornings.

DRESS CODE

Oman has a fairly conservative dress code. While tourists are not expected to wear hijabi, both men and women should plan to wear long pants (or skirts, for women) and shirts that cover the shoulders. Avoid ripped jeans or revealing clothing.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

Grade Three

This tour is among our most physically demanding. See our website for details of all requirements.



frankincense is soaked overnight and drunk medicinally at breakfast, while the fragrant resin is burned in homes, both for its pleasant odor and for keeping mosquitoes at bay. We take a day trip into the province of Dhofar today, and enjoy a tour of one of the frankincense plantations, learning about the 5000-year history, harvesting and preparation of this important Omani product. Returning to the hotel in the late afternoon, there is time to relax before dinner. Overnight Salalah (B, L, D)

Thursday 6 February Around Salalah

Today is spent exploring Salalah, starting with the open-air beachfront Al Husn Souq, located near the palace. Next, we'll stroll through the port of Al Balid, site of an archaeological excavation and an important centre for the medieval frankincense trade. The highlight of the park is the fine Museum of the Land of Frankincense, which chronicles human settlement of the area and maritime traditions since 2000 B.C.E. The afternoon is free for you to continue exploring Salalah on your own. This evening we celebrate the conclusion of the tour with a farewell dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Salalah (B, L, D)

Friday 7 February Departure

This morning we transfer to Salalah airport for our flight to Muscat. For those concluding the tour we continue to Dubai, arriving at 4.00pm in time for onward flights home. For those continuing on to the optional post-tour itinerary we instead fly to Doha, arriving at 3.00pm. (B)



ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Jamal Fairbrother** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

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