

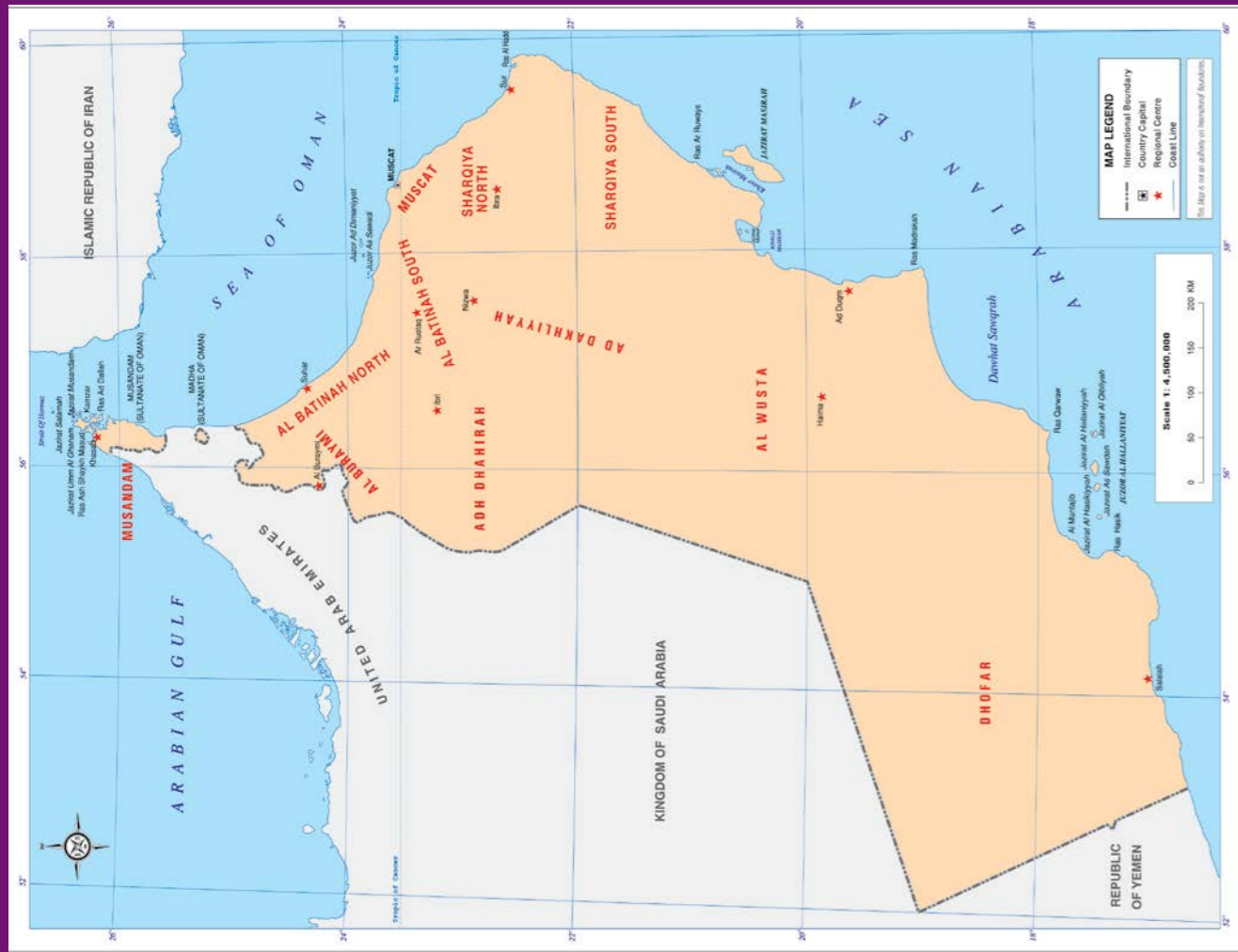
Sports & Leisure

Sultanate of Oman



SULTANATE OF
oman
Ministry of Tourism





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HIKING

Whether you are in the mountains, in the desert or by the coast, hiking in the Sultanate of Oman is an amazing and unique experience. The Hajar Mountains are the backbone of the country, and form a majestic landscape of towering peaks that contain more than 100 kilometres of marked paths. Between **Jebel Akhdar** (the Green Mountain) and **Jebel Shams** (the Mountain of Sun), which at 3,075 metres is the highest peak in the country, terraced farmland and green palm groves blend with the rocky landscape. Refreshing breaks in the emerald-green water that pools in wadis (gorges) can be enjoyed wherever you go. **Camel rides** in the Sharqiya Sands and the Rub'al-Khali desert will take you back in time as you discover Bedouin traditions. Specialist walking and hiking tour operators organise trips from October to April.

MOUNTAIN ACTIVITIES

4WD tours

With villages, palm groves nestled in the hollows of rocky amphitheatres, canyons and wadis of varying depths and widths, the mountains of Oman, stretching from one end of the country to the other, offer countless itineraries for visitors. In addition to travelling along the excellent tracks and roads, 4WDs can power up slopes and into wadis. From Muscat it is easy to get to the **Hajar** Mountains and take in the breathtaking views from the high plateaus and its Grand Canyon, called Wadi an Nakhar. Cliffs drop steeply into the ocean in the **Musandam** region, which is known for its Arabian fjords. The luxuriant vegetation that grows in the **Dhofar** heights after the monsoons is like nothing else in this part of the world.



Mountain biking

With its vast protected areas and tall peaks, the Sultanate of Oman is the perfect place for bicycle touring and mountain biking in the winter. There are some renowned mountain biking excursions from **Al Hamra**, where professional guides lead the participants on a journey of discovery through the Hajar Mountains and its traditional villages. Routes range from flat through the palm groves to challenging tracks at an altitude of 2000 metres around **Jebel Shams**, so can accommodate riders of all skill levels. Bikes can be provided, but it is also possible for riders to bring their own equipment.



Canyoning

The Hajar Mountains are full of wadis, some of which are ideal for canyoning. In the more easily accessible gorges, such

as Wadi Dayqah and Wadi Bani Khalid, the activities on offer are more like canyon hiking than genuine canyoning. In Wadi Bani Awf, the narrow **gorge of Snake Canyon** (Wadi Bimmah) contains a tricky route that can take three or four hours to complete. Beginners can attempt it with supervision. The wadis are subject to flash flooding, so it is always necessary to be prudent and mindful of the weather.



Climbing

Oman has more than 160 registered climbing sites, with something to suit adventurers of all levels. The often dizzyingly steep cliff faces of Hajar are well known among climbing enthusiasts. At 300 metres, the rock face of **Wadi Ghul** is one of the most famous spots. Strictly for experienced climbers only, **Jebel Misht** is one of the top sites in the Arabian Peninsula. It has a rock face that extends for six kilometres and stands at 850 metres tall, offering a number of access routes of varying levels of difficulty. There are also several hills near Muscat that are ideal locations for climbing.

Caving

Huge networks of underground areas exist in the Hajar Mountains, including **Majlis Al Jinn**, the second largest cave chamber in the world. Some easily



accessible caves, such as the Muqal cave, can be explored as part of a canyoning route. However, most of the caves in the Selma Plateau require solid training and professional supervision. At the foot of **Jebel Akhdar**, the **Al Hoota** cave is equipped for public access. Visitors can go on a 40-minute guided tour to see stalactites, stalagmites and karst crystals covering the walls.



HIGHLIGHTS

A two-hour drive from Muscat, **Wadi Shab**, where you can hike and swim, and its neighbour **Wadi Tiwi**, perfect for exploring villages in a 4WD, offer marvellous glimpses of the wild beauty of Oman.

Nestled at the bottom of **Wadi Bani Awf** at the foot of the mountains, **Saiq** is one of the most picturesque settlements in Oman. A road zigzags its way up the mountain from the town to the southern side of the Hajar Mountains and the village of **Misfat al Abriyyin**.

At 2000 metres above sea level, the **Saiq Plateau**, with its string of villages and terraced farmland, provides a delightful setting for hikers all year round.

Opposite the top of **Jebel Shams**, **Wadi Nakhar** is nicknamed the Grand Canyon of Oman. The site known as the Plateau is an excellent place for climbing and camping in the wild.

Wadi Bani Khalid has rock pools with naturally warm water and is the start of a three-day hiking trail that leads to **Wadi Tiwi**.

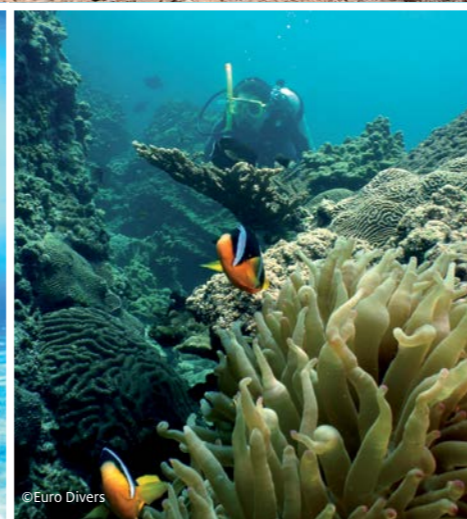
Wadi Darbat in the state of Dhofar has magnificent, luxuriant vegetation during and after the monsoon rains (July to September).



SEA ACTIVITIES

Scuba diving and snorkelling

Large numbers of fish, vibrant corals and unspoilt reefs make Oman a popular destination for divers. Off the coast of **Muscat**, there are about 20 dive spots, making it easy to fill a varied, enjoyable week in the capital city, especially when combined with sight-seeing. The bay at Bandar Al Khayran, south of Muscat, is also perfect for snorkelling. Nearby, the **Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve** boasts a peerless array of stony coral and offers opportunities for astonishing encounters with manta rays in the summer, lemon sharks, blacktip reef sharks and whales (from February to September). The sites in the **Musandam** region contain significant rock formations covered with stunning expanses of soft and stony corals. The largely unexplored depths of **Dhofar** are also spellbinding, but it is only possible to dive in the area from October to April due to the summer monsoons.



Boat trips

Whether you choose one that lasts a few hours or includes a night in bivouac on a deserted beach, a boat trip **from Muscat** is a must. All sorts of excursions are organised by local agencies: **dolphin watching** cruises often reveals pods of hundreds of the stars of the show; tours of Muscat from the sea take in views of Muttrah, the old town, the Sultan's palace and small fishing villages in the area; **Bandar Al Khayran** expeditions include snorkelling in the warm, abundant waters; and dinner cruises offer a touch of romance. Cruises take place in a wide range of vessels, including the traditional



wooden boats known as dhows, catamarans, yachts and speedboats. There is no better way than a boat trip to discover the Musandam Peninsula, where the mountains plunge into the sea. Travelling in from the waves and wandering around the isolated villages at the bottom of towering cliffs is an unmissable experience.

Sea kayaking

With their series of coves and beaches only accessible from the sea, the

fjords of Musandam form an enchanting backdrop for sea kayaking. Every winter, numerous tour operators organise combined sea kayaking and hiking trips that include camping on isolated beaches, swimming and the opportunity to see green sea turtles and dolphins in their natural environments. The bays to the south of Muscat are just as suited to exploration from the sea in kayaks, especially for visitors using a hotel as their base.



Kite surfing

From May to September, the wind on the island of [Masirah](#) is strong and constant, making it a leading kite surfing destination. It's a five-hour drive south from Muscat to Shanna'a followed by a 90-minute ferry ride to the island. The kite surfing centre there is part of the VDWS Water Sport Association and offers lessons as well as equipment hire for experienced kite surfers. Another branch of the school is open all year round on Sawadi beach, which is an hour north of Muscat.

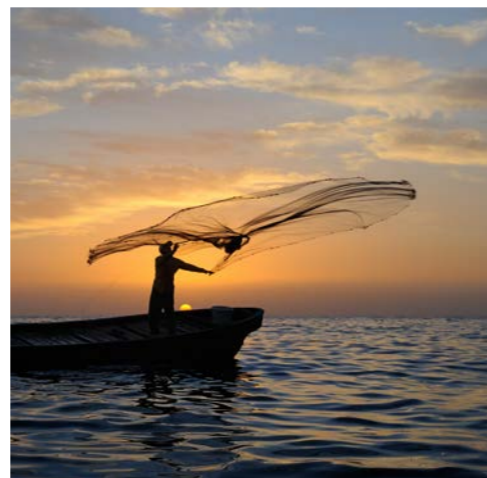


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Fishing

A rich array of sea life exists in the waters of Oman, attracting fisherman from across the globe. All the big predators and game fish can be found near the coast, while large pelagics can be targeted further out. The sea of Oman is generally calm and a number of fishing techniques – casting, fly fishing and trolling on a small or large scale – can

be utilised. [Fishing takes place all year round](#) in Musandam and off the coast of Muscat, with some periods particularly favourable for yellowfin tuna (January to April and October to November) and giant trevally (September to November and April to July). Further south in Dhofar, it is possible to fish outside the summer monsoon season. A number of specialist fishing tour operators organise trips to Oman.



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Sailing and pleasure boating

Oman Sail, the official sailing organisation in the country, runs three sailing schools – two in Muscat (at Marina Bandar Al Rowdha and The Wave complex) and one in [Mussanah](#), where a hotel provides accommodation for people taking lessons on sailing holidays. All of the centres have a number of teaching options and hire out equipment. Water sports are also organised by some four- and five-star hotels by the coast. Several services offer [cruises with skippers in sailing boats and catamarans](#), starting in Muscat and the surrounding area. The coast between the Mussanah Marina, 85 kilometres north of Muscat, and the Jebel Sifah Marina, 45 kilometres to the south, is a marvellous place for sailing, with the Sawadi islets, the Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve and the sheltered bays of Bandar Al Khayran. Between the two locations, the new Almouj marina at The Wave complex is an ideal place to stop off and explore Muscat.

HIGHLIGHTS

The bays of [Bandar Al Khayran](#), near Muscat, are havens for diving, snorkelling and pleasure boating.

Visitors come from all over the world to see green sea turtles lay their eggs on the beaches at the [Ras al-Jinz](#) nature reserve.

[Khor Ash Sham](#) (Musandam): Visitors can spend four days kayaking from cove to village at Khor Ash Sham in the Musandam Peninsula. In the crystal clear water of this spectacular fjord, you'll see turtles, rays and other marine life.

The open beaches framing the [Arabian Sea](#) are perfect for camping in the wild.

Driving along the scenic coastal road from Muscat to Salalah provides travellers with the opportunity to see a wide range of migratory birds.

DESERT ACTIVITIES

Desert camps and 4WD adventuring

Welcome to the realm of silence. Three hours by car from Muscat, the **Sharqiya Sands** can welcome visitors for a day or more, either in the comfort of a camp or simply under the stars. Throughout the desert, which stretches for 180 kilometres, there are genuine sand trails accessible by 4WDs. A particularly unforgettable journey involves crossing the waves of dunes to the Arabian Sea. In the far south of Oman, the immense **Rub'al-Khali** desert remains largely unexplored and free of tourist facilities. Excursions into the area depart from Salalah and some tour operators include it in their hiking trips.



Camel rides

The Bedouins in the Omani desert continue to engage in the traditional activity of camel raising. Each winter, big **rac**es are organised in the villages around the Sharqiya Sands, and all of the desert camps offer rides on the local beasts.



Other activities

Regardless of which camp you choose in the Sharqiya Sands, you'll be able to take on any number of adventurous activities, from climbing the dunes on foot or on a quad bike to sand skiing and **dune bashing**, which involves hurtling up and down dunes at high speeds in 4WD.

DESERT ACTIVITIES

GOLF

In Muscat there are three 18-hole golf courses. The challenging **Almouj** course (www.almoujgolf.com) was designed by Greg Norman and follows the outlines of the dunes alongside the Sea of Oman. Originally a sand course, **Ghala Valley** (www.ghalavalley.com) is found in the unique setting of a wadi. The course at **Muscat Hills Golf & Country Club** (www.muscathillsgolf.com) is set in craggy terrain criss-crossed by a number of wadis, with the Hajar Mountains in the background.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

www.tourismoman.com.au

Time difference: UTC +4

Climate: There is a hot Mediterranean climate in the north and east and it gets very hot in summer. In the Dhofar region, monsoon season last from June to September. The best time for outdoor sporting activities is from October to April.

Formalities: It is necessary to have a visa, but Australian nationals can apply from one on arrival. The cost is five rials (for stays up to 10 days) or 30 rials (for stays from 11 to 30 days). Passports must have at least six months validity. New Zealand passport holders do not require a visa.

Land area and population: 309,500 km² and 2,773,000 inhabitants.

Official language: Arabic. English is widely spoken.

Airlines: There are no direct flights to Oman from Australia and New Zealand. Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways offer regular services with daily connecting flights from Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha. Otherwise, fly with Malaysian Airlines to Kuala Lumpur or Thai Airways to Bangkok and connect to Oman Air flights to Muscat.

Useful contacts: The Sultanate of Oman Tourism can be contacted in Sydney:
Tel. +61 (0)2 9286 8930 / +61 (0)2 9286 8914
info@tourismoman.com.au
www.tourismoman.com.au
or Auckland Tel. +64 (0)9 977 2222

The Consulate General of the Sultanate of Oman
Level 4, Suite 2, St Kilda Road
Melbourne VIC 3004
Australia
Tel. +61 (0)3 9820 4096
Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm
c.general@oman.org.au
www.oman.org.au

Australian Embassy and Consular Section
Abdullah bin Hozafa Al-Sahmi Avenue
Diplomatic Quarter, Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Tel. +966 11 250 0900
Sunday to Thursday, 7.45am to 3.45pm
www.saudiarabia.embassy.gov.au



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SULTANATE OF OMAN, MINISTRY OF TOURISM

Level 6, 117 York Street,

Sydney NSW 2000

Tel. +61 (0)2 9286 8930 / 9286 8914

info@tourismoman.com.au

www.tourismoman.com.au