



# Hud Hud Travels



## Desert, Beach & Mountains

### 7 Day itinerary with Wahiba Sands, Bar Al Hickman Beach & Jebel Shams

A stylish comfortable mobile safari, encompassing six nights and seven days in beautiful northern Oman taking in much of Oman's impressive scenery and covering desert, coast, mountains, traditional towns, forts and souks.

Accommodation is 6 nights in your very own private camps in the desert, on the coast and in the mountains.

Sleeping tents vary according to the location but are always appointed with proper mattresses, crisp cotton linen, feather pillows and traditional furnishings. Each sleeping tent has its own private bathroom tent, open to the skies and furnished with soft towels, basin, shower and a selection of soaps and lotions.

Each camp will offer a large, evocative majlis, decorated in a style in keeping with the ambiance of the environment, with cushions and rugs, topical books, boules and board games. Dining is at a properly laid table under the stars beside a crackling fire. Food is, as far as possible, locally sourced and is freshly prepared by our camp chef and always delicious. We use no electric light, other than solar, and the emphasis is on preserving the atmosphere through natural lighting provided by candles, oil lamps and camp fires.

#### Day 1

Leaving Muscat after breakfast we make our way to the coastal road that runs between Muscat and Sur. After short stops at the Bimah Sinkhole and White Beach, we turn away from the sea and head up the northern face of the eastern Hajar Mountains. Following a steep gravel track that, in a short time, takes us to the peak of the impressive Selmah Plateau over 2,000 m above sea level. Views to the north are of the Arabian Sea and, to the south in the hazy distance, the Wahiba Desert.

This track passes ancient villages that were, until a couple of years ago, only accessible on foot or by donkey. This long, west facing ridge is spectacularly lined with numerous beehive tombs built by the Umm Naa people around 2500BC. Here we will stop for a delicious and freshly prepared picnic lunch.



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By mid afternoon we leave the mountains behind us and head through Ismaiyyah. Passing the 18<sup>th</sup> Century fort at Mudayrib, we leave the tarmac road behind to enter the desert and drive the final stretch on sandy tracks before reaching our camp, set-up with the russet red dunes.

The Wahiba Sands is a stunning desert of parallel valleys of sand dunes stretching north to south. Bedouin live, mostly on a seasonal basis, in the dunes tending to their camels. Our camp will be nestled deep within the desert, away from other tourists and light pollution from streets and villages at the desert's edge. The skies are crystal clear and covered with stars.

## Day 2

Watch the sunrise over the imposing Sharqiya Sand dunes from camp, or for the more energetic, make your way to the top of a dune.

After a relaxed breakfast, we drive out of the desert to Wadi Bani Khalid, one of the greatest, most dramatic wadis in Oman, a green oasis spectacularly set against a mountain backdrop. The village still farms in a traditional manner growing dates, bananas, mangoes and papaya. A walk through this remote and little visited community provides an insight into the lives of Omanis now and in many ways as they have always been. The wadi flows out of the village and into a dramatic and steep sided canyon, which winds up from its entrance, occasioned by rock pools ideal for a quick dip. We will serve a delicious Hud Hud picnic lunch in the shade of the cliffs. The route is a combination of boulders, hiking and swimming that is great fun.

On the way to the camp you could try your hand at a little off road driving in the sands when we put you behind the wheel of a 4x4. Under the expert tutelage of our seasoned Omani drivers, you will be given little tips and tricks about how to rescue even the most deeply embedded vehicle. Sand boarding can be organised in the late afternoon or, alternatively, you can just relax and soak up the views before enjoying a fantastic dinner served beside a crackling log fire.

## Day 3

After breakfast there is an opportunity to visit a local Bedouin family for traditional Omani kahwa (*coffee*) and dates. This brief meeting provides a means of better understanding how the people work and live, in what can be perceived as an extremely harsh environment.

We then jump into our 4x4s for a 100km crossing of the Wahiba sands and an opportunity for you to further hone your sand driving skills. We will stop for a delicious lunch and a quick dip where the dunes meet the sea at the fishing village of Qihayd. After lunch we continue south along the coastal road towards Bar Al Hickman, we cross a 40km salt flats before reaching our final camp, set on a white sand beach near a lagoon, where we often see flamingos, and the Indian Ocean. It is a large salt pan that is home to a vast community of sea birds as well as a host of migratory birds.



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## Day 4

We will enjoy a leisurely day on the beach with fishing, beach driving, snorkelling or perhaps we can visit the local towns and buy fresh fish if we don't succeed in catching our own, which our chef can prepare for dinner.

## Day 5

After a relaxed breakfast on the beach we wind our way north and our route takes us through the small market town of Sinaw. This is where the Bedouins come to do business and the souq, particularly on a Thursday, can be a thriving and fascinating affair with all the hustle and bustle of a Middle Eastern market at its finest. Sinaw souq is amongst one of the oldest preserved souqs in Oman and one of the few places you can find traditional silver Bedouin jewellery.

From here we continue to the foot of Jabal Shams to Wadi Ghul, where we can explore the old ruins of its abandoned village. This area is home to perhaps the highest concentration of traditional carpet weavers in Oman, and as we venture further up Jebel Shams we will see their works on display. The track takes us to the edge of the Omani Grand Canyon. Your camp will be set up nearby, offering magnificent views over the jebel.

## Day 6

We spend today exploring Jebel Shams – the highest point in Oman. It is possible to hike up to the very top where the views are extremely rewarding, or down into Wadi Ghul below (both these options would require a specialised guide, which can be provided upon request at an additional charge). Alternatively, we can take a leisurely 'balcony walk' along the edge of the 'Grand Canyon'. We then continue to a viewpoint further towards the summit to have our picnic lunch, from where, on a clear day, you can see all the way towards the coast and into some of the wadis such as wadi Mistal.

We can also head towards the UNESCO listed town of Bahla, famous for its fabulous old fort, 'souk' and handmade pottery. The town of Jabrin is not much further and is home to what is considered by many to be Oman's most impressive fort, built during the Ya'rubia dynasty in 1688 and a marvel of a castle.

## Day 7

Following a leisurely breakfast at camp, we wind our way down to Al Hamra, a 400-year old town, is home to some of the oldest preserved houses that can be found in Oman. We will visit Bait Al Safah, a renovated house turned into a museum with displays on the Omani Culture as well as life demonstrations by Omani women and men on how to bake traditional bread, grind flour, roast coffee etc.

Winding up the rocky hillside, is the small ancient village of Misfat al Abriyyin with its picturesque collection of ochre-coloured stone buildings, giving it a somewhat medieval feel. A walk through this pretty village of twisting lanes and covered passages brings you to the



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falaj (irrigation system), which runs below the village, surrounded by lush bougainvillea, banana palms and other greenery.

We then make our way towards Balad Sayt, a beautiful mountain village, for a delicious and freshly prepared picnic lunch and a walk through the village.

After lunch we continue our descend through the impressive Wadi Bani Auf. This route takes us through the Hajar Mountains, with a steep descent and is considered by many one of the greatest and most memorable off-road drives of Oman. We pass through some very rugged and extraordinary mountain scenery, through small jebel villages and often through plenty of water on the track.

We exit near Rustaq and take the tarmac road to Muscat, passing the village of Nakhl, home to a restored fort surrounded by date palms and Ain a'Thawwarah hot springs. Invigorated we arrive back to Muscat in the late afternoon.