



## Seven Day Land and Sea itinerary with Dimaniyat, Muscat, Wahiba Sands & Jebel Shams

A stylish comfortable 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 a combination of 1 night spent on a luxury catamaran, 1 night in one of Muscat's best hotels, 2 nights spent in your very own Hud Hud desert camp in the Wahiba Sands, and 2 nights in a private Hud Hud Camp on Jebel Shams.

At the camps, 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.

The camps will also 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

Today we embark on a luxury catamaran from the Al Mouj Marina and sail to the Dimaniyat Islands, where we will spend the night. The Dimaniyat Islands are a protected and uninhabited group of nine beautiful islands 18 km off the Batinah Coast north of Muscat. The islands are Oman's only marine National Nature Reserve and play host to a number of native birds and it is a successful breeding sanctuary from April through to October.

Depending on wind speeds, the journey to the islands from Muscat will take between one and three hours – a great opportunity to get comfortable, sit back and relax as the coastline gradually disappears and the islands slowly appear on the horizon. There are sometimes dolphins swimming alongside the catamaran to keep you company.



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The yacht will anchor in a tranquil bay where you can swim, discover the islands or just relax. The catamaran has four double cabins and your onboard chef will prepare a fantastic lunch and dinner onboard or on the beach.

## Day 2

After a relaxing breakfast on board, and perhaps an early morning swim, we will cruise around to another of the islands and spend a few hours snorkelling among the coral, watching the sea birds from the boat or simply absorbing the tranquillity of the islands.

Lunch will be served on board, before we head back to Muscat. If we are lucky, we may be able to buy fresh fish from a passing fisherman.

Once back at the Al Mouj Marina, we will take a 20 minute transfer to The Chedi Muscat, your hotel for the night.

## Day 3

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.

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 4

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.



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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.

We make a stop at 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.

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 5

After breakfast we drive towards the date plantations of Birkat al Mauz. at the foothills of Jebel Akhdar. Shaded date plantations are overlooked by the ruins of the original village of Birkat, which was evacuated during the Jebel wars. Here we can take a short walk along the afalaj, which is incorporated into the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Afalaj Irrigation Systems of Oman, which consists of five afalaj systems representatives of some 3000 systems still in use in Oman and which are believed to have been used in agriculture and farming for many centuries.

After lunch we head to Nizwa where we spend some time exploring Nizwa's imposing fort, from where 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.



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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 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.