



Deserts & Dunes of Oman

Classic Tour | 9 Days | Physical Level 1

MUSCAT - WADI BANI KHALID - WAHIBA SANDS - BAHLA - JABRIN

A cultural jewel in the Middle East, our 'Deserts & Dunes of Oman' tour is designed to offer you the very best that the country has to offer, from its vast history and varied landscapes to its delicious cuisine and wonderful locals. Begin in Muscat, visiting the famous Grand Mosque and venturing across the bay in a traditional Arabic dhow. Travel across arid wadis, along desert dunes and through dramatic mountain landscapes en-route to Jebel Shams, Oman's highest peak. Stay in the magical Nizwa Mountains, exploring dusty old forts and its ancient souq on this mesmerising tour.

- Enjoy a sunset cruise in the Gulf of Oman
- Visit Muscat's magnificent Grand Mosque
- Witness the crystal-clear waters of the wadis
- Explore the atmospheric souq and famous fortress at Nizwa
- Take in the majestic views from Jebel Shams
- Experience authentic Omani hospitality and cuisine



Deserts & Dunes of Oman tour inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers)
- Visa fees for New Zealand passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides

The only things you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary.

Classic Tours:

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of the Middle East on an excellent value group tour travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis so you will travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escort and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

Physical Level 1:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

'Deserts & Dunes of Oman is rated 1 on the physical level scale. A reasonable level of fitness is required but it is more about spending time on your feet rather than covering large distances. You will be getting on and off coaches and boats, walking around the sights and climbing some steps.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for both short and extended periods of time often on uneven surfaces
- You will be required to get on and off small boats without assistance

Of course, our National Escorts and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

Country Profile: Oman

The Sultanate of Oman sits on the edge of the Middle East region, with a long and glorious coastline on the Arabian Sea. A progressive and future-facing nation, it is often overlooked for its flashier neighbours – all the better for the travelers starting to catch on to Oman's many wonders, there are less people to share them with!

Here, a modern face thinly veils a thoroughly ancient soul, and many traditional values remain ingrained in the national psyche: the locals pride themselves on their hospitality, so a very warm welcome is guaranteed.

After soaking up the relaxed and friendly vibes of capital Muscat, it's time to explore Oman's greatest boon, its nature. From quaint fishing villages perched on dramatic sweeps of coastline from which you can watch old wooden fishing dhows plying turquoise waters, to the rolling sand dunes and towering red cliffs that you pass as you travel between lush oases, there is so much to explore in this undiscovered gem.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 10 days in duration including international flights. Please note due to flight schedules passengers may arrive/depart on Day 2. Travelers booked on 'Land Only, the price includes your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day 2 in Muscat and end the tour on Day 9 in Muscat. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

Itinerary Changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

Itinerary – Deserts & Dunes of Oman

Days 1-2: Fly to Muscat

Today you will fly overnight to Muscat.

Arriving the following morning, you will be met at the airport and driven to your hotel.

This afternoon, transfer from your hotel to the Marina to board your Arabic Dhow for an unforgettable journey by sea across the bay. These traditional wooden boats were used by traders long ago to cross the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea to countries including the United Arab Emirates, India and Iran.

See Muscat through the eyes of ancient seafarers who plied this route. Enjoy a brief stop at a cove along the coast and have an opportunity to take a photo of the spectacular Al Bustan Palace Hotel before returning to the pier for your transfer back to the hotel. Enjoy a welcome dinner this evening.



Destination Information

Muscat - In the foothills of the Najar Mountains and on the Gulf of Oman sits Muscat, a fascinating city that is in stark contrast to its showy Emirati neighbours. Tourists flock here to experience its many delights, including its winding souks, fresh seafood, opulent yet tasteful architecture and beautiful mosques. Muscat is also backed by the Rub' Al Khali, a vast stretch of desert that extends to Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the UAE, and thrill seekers frequently venture into the sands to traverse the desert by 4WD.

Day 3: Muscat

Visit the magnificent Grand Mosque this morning before heading to Marina Bandar. Board a boat as you venture out to sea in search of dolphins.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant followed by a photo stop at the majestic Al Alam Palace. Continue your sightseeing with a visit to Bair Al Zubair Museum, a collection that houses fabulous Omani heritage works.

Finish the day with a drive along the corniche to visit Muttrah Souq, a vibrant inner-city market where locals and tourists alike barter over gold, incense and exotic eastern spices.



Please note that women visiting the mosque are required to wear a headscarf. Both men and women are required to be fully covered (i.e. no shorts, beachwear or sleeveless outfits), though men are permitted to wear short-sleeved shirts.

Destination Information

Grand Mosque - The captivating Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque is an opulent yet tasteful display of Oman's wealth and architectural brilliance. Home to the largest chandelier and the second largest hand-woven carpet in the world (the latter of which took 4 years to weave), the Grand Mosque is the only mosque in Oman to admit non-Muslims and is a highlight of any stay in Muscat.

Al Alam Palace - This impressively colourful palace is one of the six residences of the Sultan Oman and is a contemporary take on classical Islamic architecture.

Bait Al Zubair Museum - This heritage museum contains a fascinating collection of Omani works, including ancient swords, daggers, rifles, jewellery, cosmetics and costumes from various regions of Oman.

Muttrah Souq - In the busy Muttrah district of Muscat is Muttrah Souq, reputedly one of the world oldest marketplaces. The produce available here is divided into several areas, and just watching the market stalls alive with trade is an experience in itself. Whatever you're looking to buy, there's a very good chance you can find it in this souq.

Day 4: Wadi Bani Khalid

Departing Muscat this morning, you will have a short stop at the Amouage Visitor's Centre before a 4WD journey to Wadi Bani Khalid.

After visiting this desert oasis, continue your journey to Wahiba Sands. Visit a local Bedouin family followed

by an opportunity for sunset dune bashing (driving over the dunes in a 4x4). Round off the day with a traditional barbecue at your atmospheric desert camp this evening.

***Note** that temperatures at Wahiba Sands drops at nighttime, so we recommend bringing light but warm and comfortable clothing with you. Please ensure that you are wearing adequate footwear as you will be doing some walking today.*



Destination Information

Wadi Bani Khalid - One of Oman's most famous wadis, this is a popular spot for both locals and tourists on a weekend retreat from Muscat. The inviting crystal-clear waters and unique rock formations paint a picture of a true desert oasis. Whether or not you cool off in the wadi, the photo opportunities alone make this a fascinating addition to any Oman itinerary.

Wahiba Sands - This vast stretch of dunes here are ever changing, with the winds carving the dunes into different directions and patterns year-on-year. They are romantic and mysterious yet colourful also, shifting between hues of soft gold, orange and copper depending on the time of day. Dune bashing is a popular way to experience the sands and stargazing is a must here, such is the lack of light pollution.

Day 5: Nizwa

Rise early this morning, you will check out of the camp for your journey to Nizwa. Arriving in the mountains, you will visit the famous souq and cattle market. Walk to the famous Fort of Nizwa in the city centre followed by a visit to Jabrin Castle. This castle is a perfect example of Islamic architecture and is set within a beautiful landscape.

Visit Bait Al Safah, a popular attraction and an outstanding site. Within this complex you will gain a glimpse into local life here by watching handicraft preparation, as well as learning about local customs.

We advise wearing light, comfortable clothing and walking shoes today.



Destination Information

Nizwa - In the foothills of the Najar Mountains sits the historic town of Nizwa, 'The Pearl of Islam' and one of Oman's most visited areas. Aside from the wonderful old-world feel and quaint architecture found here, Nizwa is well known for its atmospheric souq where fresh fruit and vegetables, herbs, spices, fish, silver and jewellery are on offer. You will also find the 35-metre height Nizwa Fort, a circular structure that dominates the landscape and acted as the town's primary defense long ago.

Jabrin Castle - Built by Imam Bel'arab bin Sultan Al Yarubi, whose father expelled the Portuguese from Oman and expanded Nizwa Fort, this castle is actually more of a palace, containing receptions halls, meeting rooms, a library and classrooms. This castle/palace is one of the most famous and historic in Oman.

Day 6: Jebel Shams

Journey to the oasis village of Bahla, a centre of pottery art in northern Oman. The village is surrounded by a 12km-long mud wall that shelters the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Bahla Fort. Embark on a tour of the fort.

Depart for Wadi Nakher in the depths of a deep canyon followed by a visit to the picturesque town of Misfah. Stop in the terrace farming village of Wadi Ghul en route to Jebel Shams, the highest mountain in Oman. Witness the majestic views across the valley below before making your way back to Nizwa.

Please note that at your viewpoint at Jebel Shams, you will be at an altitude of 3000m meters today.



Destination Information

Bahla - One of the country's oldest oasis towns, Bahla is also steeped in legend, being the supposed birthplace of 'jinn' or black magic, a mysterious art that predates Islam. Nowadays, Bahla is most well-known for its impressive UNESCO fort that overlooks the oasis below. Bahla has a thriving artisan history, boasting beautiful works of pottery, copper creations and ornate silver daggers.

Misfah - A beautiful mountain retreat village, visitors flock here for its agricultural terraces, inviting wadi, scenic hikes and its networks of ancient housing. The village sits precariously on the edge of a slope and palm trees sway in the mountain breeze below.

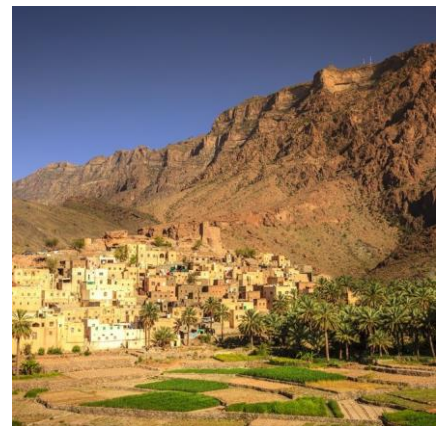
Wadi Ghul - The "Grand Canyon of Oman" is one of Oman's most famous wadis and a popular attraction for those looking to escape the heat of the nearby cities. At nearly 1km deep at certain points, this wadi offers spectacular views.

Jebel Shams - Oman's highest peak sits at 3000m and within the Jebel Akdar mountains. Whilst access is restricted to certain parts, the plateau (available to the public) offers wonderful views of the gorge below (which is a popular hiking spot) and the fabulous surrounding landscape. The views are simply mesmerising and a highlight of any visit to Oman.

Day 7: Wadi Bani Auf

Drive through scenic mountains today as you make your way to Wadi Bani Auf. Hike in this wonderful dusty canyon with dramatic scenery all around, arriving in the quaint old-world village of Bilad Sayt. View the patchwork of terrace farming and traditional houses laid out against the rocky slopes.

Enjoy a picnic lunch at the village followed by a drive to Snake Gorge where you will enjoy a final hike through the stunning mountains of Oman. Arrive in Muscat late this afternoon with a farewell dinner this evening.



Destination Information

Wadi Bani Auf - The road through this wadi is at times backed by steep drops on either side but the drive is renowned as one of the most stunning in all of Oman.

Snake Gorge - Sitting within Wadi Bani Auf, Snake Canyon takes its name not from the reptiles within but the way the gorge twists and bends. It is a popular spot not just for hiking but for canyoning (abseiling) also.

Days 8 – 9: Fly Muscat to New Zealand

After breakfast you will transfer to the airport for your overnight flight home.



Please note: Late check-out is not included in our Deserts & Dunes of Oman tour. If you wish to book a late check-out for your final day in Muscat, please contact our reservations department who can confirm the additional price and make this arrangement for you, subject to availability at the hotel.

Transfers: In the event that your flight departs outside of the majority group departure time, you will be transferred to the airport by a shared coach (not with other Wendy Wu Tours passengers).

Please inform our reservations team of any allergies and/or special dietary requirements at time of booking.

Deserts and Dunes of Oman Travel Information

Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Oman. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. We will supply you with all paperwork if applicable and submit the visa application on your behalf. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it from the date of entry into Oman.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate; Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa. Currently a visa is required for New Zealand Passport holders. Your travel consultant will inform you if any changes are applicable prior to your departure.

Insurance

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

Eating in Oman

Strongly influenced by Indian, Persian and Arabian cuisine, Omani food enjoys a growing reputation. Typical dishes include *majboos* (a dish originating in Saudi Arabia that consists of mixed rice, vegetables, chicken and spices), *meshkak* (grilled marinated chicken or beef kebabs), *mashui* (grilled kingfish garnished with a local lemon sauce) and delicious baked Omani flatbreads. *Laban* is a salty drink consisting of yoghurt and buttermilk and is usually spiced with cardamon, mint or cumin. Similar to other countries in the region, coffee and dates are commonly consumed in Oman.

Whilst Omani food is rich in diversity, western cuisine will be available during the trip as well. Should you have any dietary requirements, please make sure to inform your booking agent well in advance of your trip.

Those with dietary requirements will be well catered for - just make sure to inform your booking agent of any specific requirements well in advance of your trip.

All the restaurants we visit will be researched and inspected regularly to ensure that they follow the strictest health, cleanliness, and safety guidelines. All waiting staff will wear face masks and gloves and self-service buffets will be avoided in favour of à la carte dining, waiter-served meals, or waiter-assisted buffets. Hand sanitiser will be provided to the group before and after every food and beverage service.

Accommodation

Please read your travel guide, which you will receive with your final documents for more information about eating in Oman. We recommend that when it comes to Omani food, you stay open minded and try to be adventurous!

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are rated as local four-star standard. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning or overhead fans and a telephone. If you experience any difficulties with your rooms, please speak to your National Escort.

Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs. Please note that double bed requests can be made at time of booking but can't be guaranteed.

Porterage

Please be aware that porterage is not included on our tours in Oman . You will therefore need to be able to handle your own luggage within the hotel and when using transportation like trains and coaches.

Transport

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Main and inner-city roads in Oman have a reputation for being very congested. For this reason, it may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner. Roads in Oman have generally been improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections above are approximations only.

4WD: On days 6 & 7, you will travel by 4WD. Here you will have the opportunity to experience the thrill of venturing through the desert in an all-terrain vehicle.

Public Holidays in Oman

If you are travelling within the below Egypt Public Holidays, please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed. Coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open but may be crowded. Labour Day May 1, End of Ramadan 13 – 15 May 2021, birth of Prophet Muhammad 19 Oct 2021, Aid Al Adha 20-22 July 2021.

Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs, so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions that demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone, so we aim to take you to places that hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

Group Size

The group size on our Middle East Classic Tours is on average 10-18 passengers, with a maximum group size of 18. You may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling. On our group tours we operate a seat-and-a-half policy, allowing you to travel in greater comfort.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). A national escort will accompany each group of 10 or more. However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so.

Tipping Policy

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and Oman is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your national escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed amongst your main service providers (for example local guides and drivers) throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the national escort. Any other tipping, such as tips for bathroom attendants or hotel porters that are taking luggage to your room, is at your discretion based on satisfaction of services received, as are gratuities for additional requested special services.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

Luggage

All travelers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

Exchanging cash

It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling to cities outside of Muscat. US Dollars and New Zealand Dollars can be exchanged at Muscat Airport and in some hotels, provided the New Zealand currency is new and undamaged. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be very limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

Personal expenses and optional tours

Personal Expense - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of NZ\$250 per person, per week should be sufficient; however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional Tours – Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities.

Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing a number of steps.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

Cultural Difference

Omani society and culture are built on intricate social etiquette and customs. As foreigners, we are not expected to be knowledgeable about all etiquette, but it will make your time in Oman more enjoyable if you are respectful of local customs.

Appropriate Dress

Oman is a Muslim country and it is important that, as guests of the country, everyone should respect the local customs. It is recommended that women not wear strappy sundresses, miniskirts, shorts or low-necked dresses in public places (e.g. offices, souks, town and shopping areas). Shoulders should be covered, and skirts should be below knee length skirts with a top that is appropriately long (below the hip) is also acceptable.

Men should wear shirts (short sleeves are acceptable) and long trousers. Shorts or beachwear should not be worn except at the beach or pool area.

When visiting mosques, shorts and any tight clothing should not be worn. Women will need to wear headscarves, though these will be provided. Intimate behaviour is strictly forbidden. Visitors should be covered from head to toe. Slip on shoes are recommended for convenience for all those who enter the mosque. Visitors must stay with the National Escort at all times.

Care must be taken not to cause offence through the use of alcohol. In particular, alcohol should not be consumed in public places apart from licensed premises, such as bars & restaurants.

Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your Doctor or Health Centre for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Holiday Health has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.holidayhealth.co.nz

Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

Last updated: November 2020