



آفدي

Unlocking human potential

# Ahlan Wasahlan - Connecting Cultures in the Sultanate of Oman January 30—February 6, 2010

On May 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, Outward Bound International welcomed a new addition to the global family when the first Outward Bound school in the Arab world was launched in the Sultanate of Oman. In celebration, Outward Bound Oman extends an invitation to you join us on a five day journey through the Oman desert in early February 2010.

Led by a senior member of the Outward Bound Oman staff, we will journey south from the capital city of Muscat to the Sharqiya Sands, a sea of sand the size of New Jersey. Leaving the relative luxury of our desert camp, we will spend three days, moving slowly on foot and by camel through the sands where, in the company of our Bedouin guides and camel handlers we will have the opportunity to learn about this rich culture. The journey will be conducted at a slow pace, with regular breaks for Arabic coffee and dates. We will visit Bedouin camps, and for three days you will live the life the Bedu; there will be no electricity, no running water, no sit down toilets and best of all, no mobile signal.





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## A brief background to Oman

The size of the United Kingdom, but with a population of less than 4 million people, Oman has one of the oldest cultures on the Arabian Peninsula. Referred to by the Romans as *Arabia Felix* due to the wealth of its frankincense, Oman has a long history of exploration. With its location on the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean, Oman came to control trade from Zanzibar in Africa to India, and the great desert explorer Sir Wilfred Thesiger started both of his crossings of the Empty Quarter from Oman.

Whilst there are still some mountain villages that have no road access, since the present Sultan came to power in 1970, the pace of change in Oman has been prodigious, funded by the discovery of oil. Within the living memory of many Omanis the most common means of transport was a donkey or camel, there were only a few kilometers of tarmac road, education comprised of reciting the Qur'an under a tree and health-care was limited to herbal remedies.

One of the great successes of Oman's transition into a sophisticated country has been the preservation of the cultural and traditional elements that make it distinct from any other country in the region, and it is this distinctive culture, together with a varied landscape that now increasingly draws discerning travelers from around the world. Oman has 1,700 km of coastline, mountains that reach 9,000 feet altitude, green frankincense forest caressed by the summer monsoon and the world's largest sand desert, the Rub Al Khali, or Empty Quarter, spills over the border from Saudi Arabia.



**The Sharqiya (Eastern) Sands are 200 km south of the capital, Muscat**



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***“Oman: THE Destination for the New Year. A shining new alternative to Dubai, the state of Oman attracts the eco-tourist with its lush wadis, diverse markets, and rich culture. Unlike its better-known neighbour, it is relatively undiscovered, with a wonderful climate during our winter, glorious mountains, spectacular deserts, medieval cities and a thousand-odd miles of seaside. The Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, has turned Oman into a modern travel destination, combining the traditional values of an ancient and rich civilization with the attractions of up-to-date luxury.”***

***The Vogue Oracle  
London, UK  
January 2008***

*“Oman may seem an unlikely candidate for Tourist Hot Spot of 2006 – Saudi Arabia and Yemen are its next-door neighbors. But Oman is a peaceful wonderland of dramatic gorges, sweeping deserts and hidden villages, dotted with fairy-tale forts and castles. Europeans have already discovered this Middle East jewel, and more visitors are bound to follow.”*

***Tony Wheeler  
Los Angeles Times  
May 2006***

*“The world remains fascinated by the beauty of the Sultanate and the warmth of its people as the Global Peace Index 2008 ranks Oman for the second year in a row the most peaceful country in the Middle East and Africa, and 25th among 140 countries – way ahead of a host of nations, including the U.S. which ranked 97. In the peaceful Sultanate, visitors will experience an enviable balance of deep-rooted traditional culture and welcome modern-day reality.”*

***HI! Weekly Magazine  
Published by the Times of Oman  
August 2008***

*Since leaving Arabia I have travelled among the Karakoram and the Hindu Kush, the mountains of Kurdistan and the marshlands of Iraq, drawn always to remote places where cars cannot penetrate and where something of the old ways survive. I have seen some of the most magnificent scenery in the world and I have lived among tribes who are interesting and little known. None of these places has moved me as did the deserts of Arabia.*

***Sir Wilfred Thesiger – Desert Explorer***



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## About the Sharqiya Sands

To walk in the sands is like skiing in virgin snow; the absence of sound and human footprints give you a genuine feeling of wilderness, and for most visitors to Oman, the time they spend in the sands is the most memorable, especially the night sky.

Whilst at first glance the sands appear to be empty of life, when you walk you will discover that they contain a rich variety of flora and fauna, a variety that decreases as you go deeper into the sands. Recent surveys have shown that Mongoose, Ruppell's Sand and Red Fox are all in evidence. The remains of a wolf was also discovered at a Bedouin camp. On a more domestic note, it is estimated that 15,000 goats, 3,000 Bedouin and 1,500 camels live in the sands. For the botanists amongst you, whilst the flora of the sands is not rich, it is very diverse. 8 lichens, 4 micro-fungi, 1 fern and 162 flowering plants have been recorded. In terms of fauna, 28 species of ants, 17 species of dragonfly and 57 species of moths have been observed, together with 115 species of birds, with 21 of them found in the central sands, including the incredible desert eagle owl that can often be heard calling at dusk and dawn.

To avoid the heat, most animals in the sands sensibly come out at night, which means that all you will see are footprints each morning.



In the sands, there are two types of Bedouin – those who live in the fishing villages in the south-east, where there is little plant life for grazing animals, and the pastoral Bedouin who live with their herds of goats and camels. Because the trees, which will provide us with shade

periodically are so important to their lifestyle, the Bedouin take care not to damage them.

As with most people in Oman, the Bedouin are Muslims. Their long loose robes cover their bodies as their religion requires, and give protection from the burning sun and cold nights. The Bedouin women cover their faces from strangers. The women look after the household, care for the family and the animals. They also practice a number of crafts to make things for the family, or for sale. With an increasing number of imported goods now available in Oman, these crafts are slowly dying out.



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**Itinerary—based on flying New York>Muscat with Etihad Airways**

<b>Friday January 29th</b>	Flight departs NYJFK 2205 hrs
<b>Saturday January 30th</b>	Arrive Muscat 2250 hrs—transfer to hotel.
<b>Sunday January 31st</b>	Depart for desert 0900hrs from front desk/lobby of Grand Hyatt Hotel in Muscat. Two hour journey by coach to the edge of the sands, then 4x4 vehicle to arrive at luxury desert camp for lunch. Afternoon to explore local area, meet camels and Bedouin guide/ relax/prepare for start of desert journey tomorrow.
<b>Monday February 1st</b>	Desert camel trek-wild camping at night, leaving camp after early breakfast.
<b>Tuesday February 2nd</b>	Desert camel trek-wild camp. Up with the sunrise, moving slowly through the sands.
<b>Wednesday February 3rd</b>	Desert camel trek-wild camp. Up with the sunrise, moving slowly through the sands.
<b>Thursday February 4<sup>th</sup></b>	Return to luxury desert camp late morning for lunch, clean up and dinner.
<b>Friday February 5th</b>	Return Muscat after breakfast, check in to hotel. Lunch at hotel. 1530hrs depart for Bait Al Baranda museum and shopping at Muttrah Souq. Farewell dinner at Kargeen restaurant.
<b>Saturday February 6th</b>	Flights depart Muscat 0535. Arrive JFK 1615 hrs.

**Cost including tax deductible contribution of \$1,000 to Outward Bound International (OBI). For more information see page 7.**

10 or more participants	\$4,350
Less than 10 participants	\$4,950

The cost excludes flight, travel insurance and visa (can be secured at airport on arrival, but better if got in advance from Oman Embassy)

The cost includes all ground transport, accommodation, museum entry and meal costs within Oman. It does not include alcoholic beverages, tips or personal expenses.

Airfare from New York (coach) is currently (July) available at \$1,230



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## Oman – Quick facts

### Climate

The best time to visit Oman is from September until April, after which the temperatures and humidity rise sharply. Temperatures in the interior are both higher and lower than the averages reported for the coastal areas. The temperature charts shown below are for Muscat.

Note—the sand desert is much cooler at night than the city; be prepared for temperatures to drop to 5 degrees Celsius at night during your journey.

Temperature; Average daytime in Muscat												
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Celsius	25	27	30	33	39	41	39	37	36	35	30	26
Fahr	77	81	86	91	106	107	106	99	97	95	86	79

### Omani Currency

The unit of currency is Omani Rial, which is divided into 1000 Baizas. Notes are available in denominations of RO 50, 20, 10, 5, 1, 1/2 Rial. Coins are also in use for units under one (1) Rial. Cash machines are widespread, and all the hotels accept credit cards.

### Electricity

220-240 Volts at 50 cycles AC.

### Time Zone

Oman is 4 hours ahead of G.M.T.

### Visa

A visa is required by every visitor to the Sultanate. This can be obtained on arrival at Muscat Seeb Airport (or better still from the Oman Embassy in your country). Please ensure you have at least 6 months validity in the passport.





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## What to do next

Contact Ian Wade at OBI to with any questions you may have. To confirm a place please complete the application form and return it with the deposit. You will then be sent an enrolment package from Outward Bound Oman with details of what equipment to bring, and how to prepare for your journey.

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## Outward Bound International

The mission of OBI is to promote and protect the good name of Outward Bound throughout the world, and to assist in the establishment of new Outward Bound Centers. There are 8 such new centers at present under development. OBI also conducts risk management and quality audits of existing centers and promotes communication about best practices through publications and conferences.

## Recommended Reading

The classic book of desert travel is undoubtedly Arabian Sands by **Wilfred Thesiger**.

Another excellent read is The Seven Pillars of Wisdom by **TE Lawrence**.