



STEEPED IN HISTORY

Muscat, the capital of Oman, takes great pride in its tightly knit community and ancient mores. Drawing straight from the beginning of human evolution, it is a dream for lovers of history and nature.

Text | TOMS VARGHESE

One summer morning, as I landed in Muscat, I was surprised to be greeted by mountains instead of sand. Upon visiting the Middle East, you would expect a vast expanse of desert but Oman's landscape is diametrically different from its neighbouring nations. Extending to the third millennium BC, Oman's breathtaking natural wonders and its glorious past have together earned the country its distinctive reputation.

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NATURE'S BOUNTY

Oman has an impressively diversified landscape — from turquoise beaches and mighty mountains to labyrinthine wadis (valleys), it is a storehouse of natural wonders.

The massive limestone mount Jebel Misht, one of the largest of its kind in the country, is a dream destination for mountaineers across the world. Reaching a height of more than 1,000 feet, the mount harbours the rare Arabian tahr goat.

Situated some 200 km from Muscat, Wadi Bani Khalid is among the top geological wonders in Oman. It is a tranquil oasis where sparkling green waters are hemmed



by swaying date palms and sprawling gorges. Ras al-Jinz, on the other hand, bears a unique landscape, comprising the turquoise Al Jinz beach and myriad rock formations dotted along the shore. The site is also well-known as the

breeding ground of green turtles.

Similarly, Dalkut is a marvellous seaside spot which falls west of Salalah. Ride through the winding mountain roads before you reach the main cliffside. As



you walk towards the misty mountains, you will hear the unmistakable rumble of waves lashing against the rocks. You have to be precariously close to these cliffs to experience the sheer beauty of the sea, which gets a little rough during monsoons.

A visit to Muscat is incomplete without a jaunt to Muttrah, a quaint port town which was once the commercial headquarters of Oman. Stroll through the walkway skirting the port or climb the hillock to the seaside Muttrah Fort for a view over the Corniche. Those with adventure in their blood can also opt for the Riyam Park trek.

PRE-HISTORIC WONDERS

The country was once a thriving trade hub which had ties with the Sumerians of Mesopotamia and the Indus people, among many others. The land, which was called Magan in Sumerian cuneiform texts, was a source of copper and diorite.



Take a trip down south to Salalah in the Dhofar region to delve into the history of the region's once-flourishing frankincense trade. It is particularly evident in the remains of the ancient port named Khor Rori, which dates back to the late first century BC. The sweet aroma of frankincense from the port, which is the land of frankincense trees even today, is said to have lured traders from far and wide. Khor Rori is also a testament to Oman's

proud heritage of being a land of expert seamen, whose exploits have been legendary — think of the adventures of the fictional Sindbad the Sailor (an Omani who was said to have been born in Sohar) found in *Arabian Nights*.

Equally unmissable are the Bat and Al-Ayn necropolises, and the beehive tombs surrounding them. The view of these hill-top structures with Jebel Misht in the backdrop is one to cherish. Located



of mud and straw, its maze-like construction is said to have confused invaders and safeguarded the inhabitants.

WELL-DISPOSED CULTURE

The most endearing quality of Oman is the friendly and hospitable nature of its people. You will rarely find an Omani who wouldn't greet you with a warm smile, even if you are just passing each other by on a street.

Though oil wealth has made Oman a rich nation, the country keeps ostentatious show of wealth at bay. There are barely any sky-high buildings in Oman — the tallest being the ten-storey Sheraton Hotel at Ruwi. All major modern landmark constructions assimilate traditional aspects to seamlessly blend the best of different eras.

It is this simplicity, the alluring natural beauty, the ancient stories and above all, the welcoming people that make Oman a cultural gem.



approximately 300 km from Muscat, these archaeological findings date back to the Hafit period, and are an indisputable proof of the Early Bronze Age civilization.

The ancient city of Bahla is one of the main tourist attractions that falls on the way to Jebel Shams. The primary attraction here is the UNESCO-listed Bahla Fort. Featuring ample use



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