

Blue Dot Travel



\$17,990 pp

Twin-share, excludes
international flights

Single supp \$4,400



OMAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

Travel to the birthplace of Islam on our fascinating small group tour to Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Oman is an independent sultanate on the Arabian peninsula. Covering a strategic location on the Arabian Sea, Oman was coveted by the great powers which came and went. In the late 1400's, the Portuguese occupied much of the territory, including the capital, Muscat. Almost 100 years later, The Ottomans drove them out and occupied the region for some 100 years. The Persians also came and went briefly. Since 1741, it has been self-governing. The country occupies just over 300,000 square km and has a population of over 4 million, with the overwhelming majority being of the Islamic faith. Oman is famous for breeding its Arabian horses. Muscat, Oman's port capital, sits on the Gulf of Oman, which is surrounded by mountains and desert. With a history dating back to antiquity, it mixes high-rises and upscale shopping malls with clifftop landmarks such as the 16th-century Portuguese forts, Al Jalali and Mirani, looming over Muscat Harbour. Its modern, marble-clad Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, with 50m dome and prodigious Persian carpet, can accommodate 20,000 people.

Saudi Arabia is a culturally rich destination but remains completely off the tourist trail. It encompasses a vast expanse of arid desert and mountains. The second largest country in the Arab world (after Algeria), it is an enormous 2,150,000 square kilometres and the only nation with coastlines on the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Home to Mecca and Medina, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the spiritual caretaker of the two holiest shrines in the Islamic world, a role it takes seriously. Staunchly traditional, the country's citizens are required by law to be Muslims. It is one of the few places on earth that has a 'religious' police force. Saudi Arabia is also a land with a vibrant cultural pedigree. Away from the glitz and glamour of its oil-rich, ostentatiously wealthy modern cities, the country is laden with World Heritage sites and remote mountain villages. Amongst the rock-hewn splendours of Madain Saleh, you can find Nabatean treasures on par with those at Petra. At the same time, the mud-brick ruins of Diriyah provide a fascinating insight into the origins of the Saud Dynasty. The mountains of the southwest are home to a surprising collection of traditional villages that still evoke echoes of the past, whilst the haunting ruins of Al Ula provide a chance to explore one of the most impressive ghost towns anywhere in the Middle East.



Departure, Saturday 31st October

Depart Australia for Muscat.

Day 1, Sunday 1st November Arrive Muscat

Arrive at the main hall at Muscat International Airport and transfer to the centrally located hotel. The remainder of the day will be at leisure, allowing you to either relax or explore your local surroundings. Overnight at Somerset Panorama Hotel Muscat (or similar). **D**



Day 2, Monday 2nd November Sur via Wadi Shab

What sets Oman apart from other Gulf states is its

diverse geography and natural beauty. Today starts with breakfast and then a light hike through Wadi Shab, which is a great way to see it properly. There is the possibility for a swim along the way, so bring along a change of clothes and bathers. We will pass through the Bimmah Sinkhole, featuring a sparkling azure saltwater pool. We will arrive at the fishing town of Sur,

home to the traditional Omani dhows (boats). We'll visit the dhow factory in the open-air museum. Subject to the season, tonight there's an optional turtle-watching experience. Overnight at Sur Plaza, Sur, for just one night. **B/D**



Day 3, Tuesday 3rd November Sur – Wahiba Desert

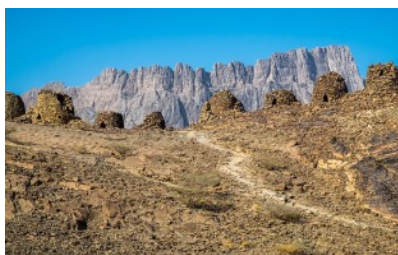
Today, we embark on a stunning coastal drive, which leads us to Wadi Bani Khalid, where water flows all year round. The most loved wadi in the country, it features large pools of turquoise and emerald-coloured water lined with lush green palm trees, inviting you to jump in and refresh. And for the main destination of the day, we'll traverse through the elevations of the vast Wahiba desert. We have an overnight stay at an authentic desert camp, complete with delicious cuisine and entertainment, an experience everyone will enjoy. Overnight at Sama Al Wasil Desert Camp (or similar) for one night. **B/D**





Day 4, Wednesday 4th November **Wahiba Desert – Ibra – Zukait Tombs –** **Nizwa**

After breakfast, we'll proceed to Ibra, a historic village in Oman celebrated for its rich cultural heritage and traditional architecture. Its streets are lined with beautiful mud-brick buildings that reflect the essence of Omani design. A highlight of Ibra is the Women's Souq, a vibrant market run entirely by local women. The Women's Souq in Ibra only takes place on Wednesdays. Visitors can find an array of traditional Omani crafts, textiles, and handmade items that showcase the skills and creativity of the artisans. Exploring Ibra is a journey through time, highlighting the enduring traditions of Oman. At Zukait, we'll view



the old beehive tombs. Like those of Bat, the tombs of Zukait bear witness to the expansion of an ancient civilisation present on Omani territory as early as

3000 BC. Overlooking the village, the site features several cylindrical towers constructed from tightly packed stones without the use of mortar. The archaeological missions in the immediate vicinity attest to the ancient existence of a vast Hafit-style necropolis, comprising hundreds of burials. Later, we'll visit the Bahla Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Located near Nizwa, Bahla is a must-visit landmark in Oman. Overnight Al Diyar Hotel Nizwa (or similar). *B/D*



Day 5, Thursday 5th November **Nizwa**

After breakfast, our guide will take us on a tour of the cultural capital of the country, Nizwa, which will include Nizwa Fort – the most visited site in the country outside of the capital. We will also visit Jebel Shams, the Mountain of the Sun, and Al Hamra, a traditional Omani village renowned for its rich heritage. Then, the group will be taken to Bait Al Safa, a traditional house where you can gain insight into the daily life of rural Omanis. Enjoy coffee and dates before heading back to Nizwa. *B/D*



Day 6, Friday 6th November **Nizwa – Muscat**

Today we may have the opportunity (depending on the day of the week) to visit the animal auction market to watch the farmers bargain for their cattle and other stock. We'll also have an opportunity to visit the bustling Nizwa souq. The group will then transfer to the foot of the Jebel Akhdar Mountain at Birkat Al Mauz, a stunning

place. Stroll through the deserted, ruined village, surrounded by date plantations and a falaj, the ancient irrigation system that is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Transfer back to Muscat and check into the hotel. *B/D*



Day 7, Saturday 7th November **Muscat**

After breakfast, we'll visit the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque (the world's fifth largest mosque), with a single woven piece of carpet covering the whole of the prayer hall. Passing by the diplomatic quarter, we will next be taken to the oldest and largest market in the country, Muttrah souq. Your guide will allow you to wander through the alleys at your leisure. Then we'll stop is the Al Alam Palace where the Sultan receives his state guests. The palace is flanked by two Portuguese fortresses, Al Jalail (1578) and Al Mirani (1581). We will visit the local museum, which features traditional artefacts and history, before returning to the hotel for dinner. *B/D*



Day 8, Sunday 8th November **Muscat**

Today, we have an optional sea trip along the coast of Muscat, featuring dolphin watching and a dip in the sea of Oman, surrounded by corals and colourful fish near Bandar Kairan. Picnic on a beach and enjoy the serenity of the cove, and on the way back, experience Oman's coastline from a unique vantage point (beach mats, umbrellas and a towel provided). Dinner at your leisure. *B/L*



Day 9, Monday 9th November **Muscat to Riyadh**

Transfer to Muscat International Airport for the flight to the Saudi capital, Riyadh, for a two-night stay. In the afternoon, a tour of Riyadh City. The National Museum opened in 1999 to celebrate the centenary of Saudi unification. It comprises eight galleries that tell the complete story of Arabian History, from the creation of the universe to the modern era. Then, visit the Al Murabba Historical Palace and the magnificent Al Masmak Palace, constructed in the 14th century Hijri during the reign of Imam Abdullah bin Faisal as his residence and the centre of power and money. Souk Al-Zal is found in the Al-Dirah neighbourhood in the heart of Riyadh. It is one of Riyadh's oldest traditional markets, with a rich history within its alleyways. Known for its traditional mud-brick architecture, Ad Diriyah is home to the revitalised Al Bujairi, a



pedestrianised maze of winding alleyways with cafes and craft shops. Cultural sites include the Diriyah Museum, a former palace with exhibits on Saudi history, and the restored Al-Zawihra Mosque. A river lined with date palms runs through Wadi Hanifah valley, a popular spot for the locals. Dinner tonight is at MAIZ, a unique fine dining concept that brings authentic Saudi cuisine in a thematic Saudi Arabian cultural setting. **B/L/D**



**Day 10,
Tuesday
10th November
Riyadh City Tour**

The King Abdullah Financial District (KAFD) is a mixed-use financial district

near King Fahad Road in the Al Aqeeq area of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The district is the largest LEED* Platinum certified mixed-use business centre in the world. (*LEED being the most widely used green building rating system). The KAFD Grand Mosque in Riyadh boasts a striking design inspired by the desert rose, featuring 1,500 prayer spaces spread across two levels within a column-free space. Then, we'll view Riyadh's beauty from 300 metres up, through secure glass panels of the Sky Bridge. The group will have lunch with a local family – a great way to experience the warmth of Saudi hospitality. You'll indulge in traditional homemade dishes bursting with flavour. After lunch there'll be some time to relax at the hotel before taking a sensation 4 x 4 journey called "Edge of the World" – a high mountainous destination that has been created over time. This breathtaking place is where the golden sun reflects on the mountains during the day, making them look shiny, while at night, you can enjoy the serenity of stargazing from the cliffs. **B/L/D**



**Day 11,
Wednesday
11th November
Riyadh – Al Ula**

After breakfast, we'll depart from Riyadh Airport to Al Ula Airport (flight TBA).

Maraya is an architectural wonder that has quickly reached icon status. This magnificent mirrored structure in Al Ula's Ashar Valley will make you feel that your eyes are deceiving you as Maraya seems to disappear into the surrounding sandstone cliffs before swiftly reappearing. A multi-purpose venue for concerts, events and conferences, Maraya — meaning

'mirror' in Arabic — is the largest mirrored building in the world and is a piece of art in itself. The group will have a dinner here which will be an amazing experience! Stay at the Habitas Hotel for three nights. **B/L/D**



**Day 12, Thursday 12th November
Al Ula**

Formerly known as Al-Hijr or Hegra in Greek, (UNESCO-listed), Madain Saleh was a pivotal city in the Nabatean Kingdom, flourishing from the 2nd century BCE until the Roman conquest in 106 CE due to its strategic location along the caravan trade route. Our guided tour will delve into the mysteries of its tombs, ancient inscriptions, stone structures, and more.

Experience the beauty and history of Al Ula's Heritage Oasis Trail on this 3km walking tour. Guided by experts, you'll enjoy AlUla's warm hospitality with dates, dried fruits, and coffee



before embarking on a scenic journey. Discover lush farmlands, picturesque views, and iconic palm swings. Al Ula is the largest ancient city after Makkah. Its ancient houses, alleys and unique design impress everyone who visits it, as its people built it in a maze-like village. The adjoining mud buildings constituted a means of protection from enemy attacks. Moussa Ben Noussair Castle forms an amazing view of the town's details. Many Islamic monuments characterise the site of the old town (now abandoned), the most important one is Masjid Al-Izam in the southeast of the town. Its foundation is attributed to the Prophet (PBUH), who stopped there to perform prayer while en route to the Battle of Tabuk. It was called Al-Izam (bones) because its place was marked with bones. **B/L/D**



**Day 13,
Friday 13th
November
Al Ula**

Dating back to the 1st century BC, Dadan was the capital of the Dadan and Lihyan



kingdoms, featuring inscriptions and several tombs. Jabal Ikma features numerous rock art inscriptions – an open-air library of multiple languages, including Aramaic, Minaic, Nabataean, Thamudic, and Dadanitic. Then we will visit Elephant Rock. Unlike the ornate, hand-carved facades of nearby Hegra's Nabataean tombs, this monolithic red sandstone beast's

"trunk" and "body" were shaped by natural forces — millions of years of wind and water erosion.

For dinner tonight, we'll immerse ourselves in an unforgettable dining experience at a secluded venue tucked amidst ancient rocks, where every moment is touched by magic. As you savour each exquisite dish, let the rhythm of the music and the enchanting ambience make this special dinner an unforgettable journey for all your senses. **B/L/D**



**Day 14, Saturday
14th November
Al Ula – Khaybar
– Al Madinah**

After breakfast at the hotel, we will depart from Al Ula and head to

Khaybar, where you'll embark on a journey through time in the oasis, a cradle of ancient civilisation. Before the arrival of Islam in the 7th century, the area had been inhabited by Arabian Jewish tribes until it fell to Muslim conquerors under Muhammad during the Battle of Khaybar in 628 CE. Dinner tonight is at Takya Restaurant, a wonderfully contemporary and colourful twist on traditional Saudi cooking. Accompanying this special dining experience are fabulous views over the Khaybar landscape while you eat. Your hotel for just one night is the Sofitel Shahid Al Madina. **B/L/D**



**Day 15, Sunday 15th November
Al Madinah**

After breakfast, the group will visit the Museum of the Prophet Muhammad Mosque, a significant cultural and historical site commemorating the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, the central figure of Islam. This museum showcases artifacts, manuscripts, and exhibits depicting various aspects of the Prophet's life, including his birth, childhood, prophethood, teachings, and legacy. Then we will see



The Prophet's Mosque - the second mosque built by the Islamic prophet Muhammad in Medina; after that,

we'll visit Quba, the second largest mosque and the holiest site in Islam, after the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, in the Saudi region of the Hejaz. Quba Mosque is one of the oldest mosques in Islam and holds great significance as the first mosque built by the

Prophet Muhammad after his migration from Mecca to Medina. Explore the historical and spiritual significance of Mount Uhud near Medina, the site of the pivotal Battle of Uhud in 625 AD. Then, we will discover Madinah's bustling local markets, filled with colours, scents, and cultural wonders. Explore authentic treasures and immerse yourself in the city's vibrant heritage. Transfer to the train station for our trip to Jeddah, where we'll stay at The Shangri-La Hotel two-night stay. Dinner at the hotel. **B/L/D**



**Day 16, Monday 16th November
Al Madinah – Jeddah**

For a fascinating look into Jeddah's long and cosmopolitan past, we'll take a trip to the Tayebat Museum for a well-curated representation of the city's 2,500-year history. Then the group will visit the amazing

Jeddah Yacht Club to admire its highlight: a 20-meter-high glass-and-steel structure resembling a ship's mast, reflecting the sun and sea.



Across the water stands the renowned "floating mosque," elevated on pillars just above sea level, our next stop. Enhanced by advanced sound and lighting technologies, it showcases a blend of Islamic and traditional architecture, radiating serenity and beauty, particularly when illuminated by the sun. The next stop is Old Town Jedda, which boasts old buildings, a traditional souk and many restaurants. Visitors get to walk amid the old streets and experience the traditional landscape of the old town – an era of old Saudi Arabia. Dinner tonight is at one of Jeddah's top fine dining spots, Nafoura. Enjoy international and Middle Eastern cuisines, fresh produce, and stunning Red Sea views. **B/L/D**

**Day 17, Tuesday 17th November
Jeddah – Next Destination**

After breakfast, have a little free time until your flight home or to your next destination. Flight schedule to be advised. **B**



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. **An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section.** Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.