

TOURISM LINKING CULTURES

WORLD TOURISM DAY
27 September 2011

MINISTRY OF TOURISM SULTANATE OF OMAN



CONTENTS

4 World Tourism Day

H.E. Al Sheikh Abdulmalik Abdullah Al Khalili Minister of Tourism
Tourism Linking Cultures

Taleb Rifai UNWTO Secretary-General
World Tourism Day Message

Mohammed Ali Said
An Industry Promoting Culture

6 Promoting Culture

Salem Al Mamari
Marketing Culture - Beauty has an address

Asila Sultan
Oman Air - the First Step on your Journey to Oman

David Graham
Oman Sail - Making Waves for Oman

8 Industry Planning & Development

Eng Wael Bin Ahmed Al Lawati
Omran Linking Cultures

Mohammad Al Sinani
Al Jabal Al Akhdar

Robert MacLean
Hospitality and Tourism Training – Careers Across Culture

10 Cultural Destinations & Events

Mohammed Al Zadjali
Attractions that Build Cultural Linkages

Iman Al Handawi
Royal Opera House Muscat – Linking Cultures

Khalid Al Zadjali
Building Cultural Awareness

12 Visitor Experiences

Clara Zawawi
Ocean Blue International Charter Company
Linking Cultures

Tomy P.V.
Musandam Peninsula – A Giant of a Destination

Mussallem Hassan Al Mahari
Learning from Visitors

20

References

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Organisation
www.unwto.org



Tourism Linking Cultures

H.E. Al Sheikh Abdulmalik Abdullah Al Khalili

Minister of Tourism

As Oman's Minister of Tourism, it is my great pleasure to launch this booklet to mark 2011 World Tourism Day, under the theme set by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation – *Tourism Linking Cultures*.

Oman's tourism industry is delighted with this year's theme for good reasons.

First, the tourism sector is unmatched in its promotion of cultural values and understanding. Cultural linkages are at the core of tourism, as it generates global dialogue and peace. For its part, the Government of Oman through the Ministry is progressing bilateral tourism agreements and working with international tourism and Omani agencies to ensure a solid global and regional framework for tourism. The Ministry's support for initiatives such as World Tourism Day demonstrates our commitment in this regard.

Secondly, tourism is a global 'people' business and its stakeholders must be culturally aware to be competitive. This is an important message for Oman as the sector grows and more companies have the opportunity to respond to the increasing demand for human resources and training, accommodation and visitor services.

Finally, the coming year sees the opening of several resorts and hotels, the Royal Opera House Muscat, as well as the on-going expansion of Oman Air's network to Zurich and Moscow - all adding to the cultural diversity and depth of our industry. Many of these initiatives are covered in this booklet.

It is hard to imagine a world without tourism and the understanding and peace it generates. Through marketing, infrastructure development, human resources training and visitor services, the Sultanate is building a strong and sustainable tourism sector that showcases Oman's culture that welcomes and learns from others. This is an opportunity for all Omanis.

I thank the contributors to this booklet. Their pieces illustrate many areas of industry activity that generate cultural linkages, now and into the future.

I commend the booklet to you.



World Tourism Day Message

Taleb Rifai

UNWTO Secretary-General

With 940 million tourists crossing international borders in 2010, never have the world's peoples and cultures been drawn together as now. Through tourism, millions of people are brought closer every day.

World Tourism Day (WTD) 2011 is taking place under the theme *Tourism – Linking Cultures* and is a celebration of tourism's role in breaking down barriers across cultures and fostering tolerance, respect and mutual understanding. In our often divided world, these values represent the stepping stones towards a more peaceful future.

Promotion and developing tourism with a view to contributing to economic development, international understanding, peace, prosperity, and universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all is at the heart of UNWTO's mandate. Every people and every place possess a unique culture. Experiencing different ways of life, discovering new food and customs and visiting cultural sites have become leading motivations for travel, and as a result, crucial source of revenue and job creation, particularly for developing countries. Income from tourism is often redirected towards the safeguarding of these sites and even the revitalization of cultures.

Yet tourism growth brings serious responsibilities to minimize any potentially negative impacts on the cultural assets and heritage of mankind. The global code of Ethics of Tourism, a set of universal values, principles and standards, guides tourism's development so that it is sustainable, ethical and responsible.

Ultimately, tourism is an economic sector based on human interaction, exchange and dialogue. WTD 2011 is a call to all those involved in tourism to act in a way that is conscious and respectful of culture, which promotes intercultural dialogue and ensures that local communities fully participate in, and benefit from, the development opportunities of tourism.

We look forward to celebrating the cultures of the world with you.



An Industry Promoting Culture

Mohammed Ali Said

Acting Undersecretary, Ministry of Tourism

Tourism is making its presence felt across the Sultanate. From just a handful of visitors a decade ago to around 2 million visitors from over 150 countries in 2010. The story is one of sustained solid growth - a remarkable outcome for any destination.

This booklet illustrates the impressive cultural dimensions of this growth, and covers a wide range of industry activities. A key point from the contributions is that culture is at the heart of our tourism industry. Cultural identity, heritage and values are expressed in many ways; through the interpretation of historic sites, the look and feel of our marketing and promotions, the focus given to cultural festivals, cultural awareness and professional development programs, and the detail given to the master planning and design of new precincts and attractions. In combination, these elements make Oman a distinctive, quality tourism destination and visitor experience.

A clearly understood and attractive cultural identity is a critical success factor for tourism. This raises wider challenges such as ensuring the protection and preservation of heritage, biodiversity and natural values, especially as the rate of economic development quickens. A whole of industry approaches to these challenges will lead to Oman's tourism strategy giving greater emphasis to cultural vibrancy through heritage, arts, events, festivals and fashion.

Working towards this goal, in late 2011, the Ministry will launch Oman's first global awareness campaign on BBC Worldwide. The campaign will run for several months and involve 1,700 television and 4.7 million web advertisements. Cultural identity and vibrancy are core elements of the campaign which conveys moments in Oman when visitors realise beauty has an address.

Table 1. International Passenger Arrivals by Country to Muscat International Airport

Passenger Arrivals to Muscat Airport 2005-10				
Country	2005	2010	Change	
India	320,189	714,301	123%	
UAE	206,284	349,706	70%	
UK	71,582	68,508	-4%	
Qatar	32,939	53,501	62%	
Bahrain	25,485	39,053	53%	
Saudi Arabia	17,285	50,341	191%	
Germany	16,163	47,158	192%	
Kuwait	11,215	23,537	110%	
Switzerland	8,285	7,984	-4%	
France	7,247	27,133	274%	
USA	5,640	15,911	182%	
Netherlands	4,967	7,775	57%	
Italy	3,492	8,558	145%	
China	2,705	10,690	295%	
Australia	2,481	5,105	106%	

Source: IATA





Marketing Culture - *Beauty has an address*

Salem Al Mamari

Director General, Tourism Promotion, Ministry of Tourism

This year's World Tourism Day theme is a welcome opportunity to provide an insight to the Ministry of Tourism's marketing efforts from a cultural perspective.

This covers consideration of our marketing role, scope of activities, and priorities for the year ahead. This coverage also responds to the many enquiries the Ministry receives from aspiring travel writers and photographers seeking advice on possible articles and images that might be useful to market Oman as a tourism destination.

Destination marketing focus

The Ministry's primary marketing focus is as a destination marketer with responsibility for building awareness in Oman in selected regional and international tourism source markets. This requires educating both the travel and tourism trade, and consumers, about the Sultanate, its regions, attractions and visitor experiences, and converting this interest into a commitment to travel to Oman. It sounds easy but Oman competes with many thousands of destinations, experiences and alternate value propositions. In practice, good marketing is research-based to better understand key markets and segments, the most effective promotions networks, and cost-effective channels to market a consistent destination values. Good destination marketing is squarely focused on projecting culture and experiences effectively, and doing this in a way that is 'true to brand'; a challenge marketing professionals say is like 'looking through a two way mirror'. Let's use the two-way mirror analogy.

For a destination to be 'true to brand' it must convey the reflection shown in the mirror – to mislead, overstate or under deliver will not win the respect or provide an environment for growth. You can also stand close or far away from the mirror to give perspective and detail. Looking through the mirror enables you to identify your target audience for promotions that attract their attention and interest. Without this two-way precision, marketing resources and effort are spent poorly and opportunities lost.

So what devices and principles do we apply to convey our cultural values and attract the markets and segments we value?

The first device is Oman's National Brand Mark and its call to action: *Beauty has an address*. A brand is a valuable business asset – it is what people respond to at an emotional level; is Oman a safe and peaceful destination, and does it have great natural attractions? These are the kinds of responses



Experience the traditions of the past and present.

Looking for excitement, set in stunning natural beauty, with a host of rich Arabian cultural events? Well there's no better place than the Sultanate of Oman, and no better time than now.

Between November and April, Oman will be home to a variety of hallmark performing arts, sports and cultural festival events including the Muscat Heritage and Culture Festival, the 2nd Asian Beach Games, the Tour of Oman cycle race, and performances by the Oman Royal Opera and Symphony Orchestra.

We're very excited and so should you. So come and join us, as we share Oman's riches with the world.

Fly non-stop to Muscat on Oman Air (www.omanair.com).

Beauty has an address

www.omantourism.gov.om | www.oman.travel | www.omantourism.com | www.visitoman.nl
www.visitoman.be | www.tourismoman.com.au | www.tourofoman.om | www.muscat-festival.com



destination brands can evoke. Brands can also sustain business activity through micro and macro challenges so it is vital to continually invest in brand. As Oman's Brand champion for tourism, the Brand Mark is the template for promotions by the Ministry to convey Oman's cultural values, attributes and elements.

Another device is our preference for images that convey (in a single frame and powerfully) three elements - destination, experience and people. In combination, these elements give identity and allow people to gain familiarity with Oman. By alluding to the tangible/intangible experiences we can help people realise that beauty has an address. The Ministry's preference is to source images from Oman's photographers. This is a proactive way to grow local creative arts and gives local talent the satisfaction of seeing their images projecting Oman's culture to the world under the Oman Brand Mark. Recent examples of this include the Ministry's use of winning images from the 2009-10 photographic competition including Muhammad Al Shanfari's image of balsam flowers in Dhofar that featured in Oman's 2011 summer campaign.

The final device is the text used in our communications across all media channels. It complements evocative images and provides the bridge to our strap line. In summary, the Brand Mark, strap line and the above devices are the elements that convey Oman's position as a cultural destination for responsible and special interest tourists.

How are marketing activities managed?

Working to a strategic plan, marketing campaigns are managed by a multi-cultural team via representative offices in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, The Netherlands, Italy, Russia, United Arab Emirates, India & Australia. This team promotes Oman through a wide range of activities including:

- Tourism and travel trade education programs;
- Trade and media familiarization visits to Oman;
- Cooperative marketing campaigns;
- Consumer direct campaigns;
- International trade and consumer shows.

What programs are planned to promote Oman internationally?

International promotions for the coming year include:

- In late 2011, Oman's first global awareness campaign will launch on BBC Worldwide, building on our brand and communications work. This is an exciting project that will make a step change in Oman's tourism performance.

- Ongoing corporate, trade and consumer marketing managed from Muscat and the Ministry's international offices. These are summarised in the schedule of international trade and consumer shows managed by the Ministry in 2011, with all shows enjoying the active participation of Oman's tourism resorts, hotels and tour companies.
- Major international exhibitions such as the Adornment and Identity – Jewellery and Costume from Oman Exhibition that ran at The British Museum in 2011, and the Sultanate's involvement as an exhibitor at the World Expo to run at Yeosu, South Korea from mid-2012.

This insight illustrates the priority given to culture has across the Ministry's marketing programs. We see this focus increasing for the many reasons covered in this booklet.

Trade Exhibitions	Month
BIT Milan, Italy	February
SATTE, New Delhi, India	January
ITB Berlin, Germany	March
SeaTrade, Miami, USA	
GITBM, Abu Dhabi, UAE	
ATM Dubai, UAE	May
IMEX, Frankfurt Germany	
Top Resa, Deauville, Paris	September
OTDKYH, Moscow, Russia	
World Travel Market, London, UK	November
EITBM, Barcelona, Spain	
International Luxury Travel Market, Cannes	December



Oman Air - the First Step on your Journey to Oman

Asila Sultan

Cabin Crew, Oman Air

As a flight attendant on Oman Air's new Airbus A330 aircraft, I am privileged to be able to see some of the most beautiful places on Earth. I have flown to fantastic destinations across Europe and South East Asia, gazed at stunning creations in the shop windows of Milan's fashion district and watched the sun set over the Himalayas in Nepal. I have taken off from the cultural melting pot of London and landed in the calm tropical paradise of the Maldives. But one of the greatest pleasures has been to touch down at Muscat International Airport and welcoming visitors to Oman.

All of Oman Air's services, to each of its 41 worldwide destinations, originate in the Sultanate, so every one of our customers has the opportunity to enjoy a little of the hospitality for which Oman is famed. And for those who stay a little longer, Oman has much to offer – thousands of kilometres of untouched beaches, rugged mountains and dramatic desert landscapes. Our ancient culture combines with the best of the modern world to provide wonderful luxury hotels and spas, mouth-watering cuisine and endless leisure pursuits. So, welcoming passengers back to Oman Air for their return journeys and hearing them describe their experiences and impressions of the Sultanate are always a source of immense pride.

And that sense of pride increases when my colleagues and I welcome customers aboard the aircraft. Oman Air has worked tirelessly to ensure that our A330s offer not only the very latest in comfortable, spacious luxury air travel, but also the very best in friendly and attentive service.

Our Economy Class seats feature adjustable head and leg rests, plenty of leg and elbowroom, seatback inflight entertainment screens and access to power points and USB sockets – and the food and refreshments are both plentiful and delicious. Meanwhile, we often have to reassure our Business Class passengers that they are in the right cabin, as they tend to mistake it for First Class. With direct aisle access for every passenger, extra-long and fully lie-flat seats, 17-inch video screens and a la carte dining, it is not difficult to see why. It fully deserved being voted Best Business Class Seat in the World at the recent World Airline Awards.

Of course, our First Class cabin is in a league of its own. It has just six mini-suites, each with direct aisle access and possibly the longest lie-flat seat available on any commercial airliner. Privacy, 23-inch video screens, a comfortable lounge area at the front of the cabin, fine dining and superb service from my highly trained colleagues ensure that each passenger is treated like royalty – which, of course, they may actually be!

And, throughout the aircraft, our pioneering mobile phone and Wi-Fi connectivity, together with our state-of-the-art inflight entertainment system (including live satellite TV) enable all of our customers to enjoy the latest movies, music or games, catch up on some work, check emails or phone home.

However, the Oman Air experience is available not only at an altitude of 12,000 metres, but also on the ground. With internet booking, debit card payments and web check-in, catching the plane you want could not be easier, whilst our First Class and Business Class limousine service will whisk you to the airport, and pick you up at the other end, in style. Our airport lounges are ideal places to relax before boarding, especially at Muscat, where Oman Air has recently opened brand new First Class and Business Class lounges. Here, Oman Air's chefs will rustle up the perfect pre-flight meal or snack, you can relax with a drink from the bar, or enjoy a complimentary massage from The Chedi Spa's experts. First Class passengers will then be picked up by a chauffeur-driven Audi A8, to be delivered, cool and unruffled, to the doors of their flight.

Clearly, our lounges are as relaxing and convenient for our short haul passengers as they are for those travelling longer distances. Many visitors to Oman live within the GCC region and come to Oman on business, to discover more about the time-honoured history and traditions of the Sultanate, or to experience the Khareef, the monsoon that brings cool relief from the summer heat and which is unique to the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. And Oman Air's expanding and flexible fleet of aircraft ensures that the highest quality of in-flight service is available to visitors from even the closest destinations.

Just this year, Oman Air put the first of its new Embraer 175 jets into service and ensured that short haul passengers, like those on long haul flights, can enjoy the very best in luxury air travel. The Embraers, again, offer lots of space and comfort, with just 60 seats in Economy Class and 11 in Business Class, together with seatback monitors, audio and video on demand inflight entertainment and, of course, Oman Air's unbeatable hospitality.

My colleagues and I are not the only ones to have noticed how good Oman Air's products and services are. We carried more passengers on our network last year than ever before – 38% more than the previous year – and we are winning increasing numbers of awards. In addition to Best Business Class Seat in the World, we won the Service Excellence, Middle East category of the World Airline Awards, which complemented the Best Luxury Airline, Middle East honour that Oman Air received in the Business Destinations Awards earlier in the year. Further accolades have been received in Germany, the UK, Malaysia and, naturally, in the Middle East – even our amenity kits have won prizes.

We are confident that Oman Air is unbeatable in terms of its quality, attention to detail and value, and unique in its uniting of traditional hospitality with 21st Century innovation and efficiency. In that, it is a true reflection of the Sultanate of Oman - and of our slogan: 'Modern Vision, Timeless Tradition'.

So, whether you are travelling from afar or from closer to home, booking with Oman Air truly is the first step for any visit to Oman.



Oman Sail - Making Waves for Oman

David Graham

Wherever its sailors proudly fly the flag of Oman around the world, Oman Sail makes people sit up and take notice.

Oman Sail was officially launched in December 2008. The aim? To attract more visitors to Oman, increase the number of young male and female Omani's who sail through education and training, develop a sailing infrastructure, including sailing schools and the creation of new jobs and skills for the next generation. And finally to develop sailors capable of competing on the world stage, including the Olympic Games.

With a coastline that stretches 3,165 km, sailing is truly re-igniting Oman's great maritime heritage in the country. Oman Sail welcomes this year's World Tourism Day theme - using tourism to promote Omani culture, as it is at the heart of everything that the organisation does.

Oman has enjoyed a long and glorious maritime history, with our forefathers crossing the oceans on the traditional trading routes, dating back as long ago as medieval 10th century ships, when the Asian dhow 'Sohar' made its crossing to China. Oman Sail is now rekindling that maritime heritage.

Omani sailors have enjoyed exceptional success internationally over the past few years, but the scale of Oman Sail's achievements can be seen much closer to home in the sailing schools, which are educating the next generation about Oman's history, culture, and perhaps most importantly, connecting the youth to their past.

The last four years have seen many firsts for Oman Sail and their sailors have already enjoyed some great successes on the international sailing arena, raising the profile of the country, and educating a global audience about Omani culture and the Oman Sail project.

Recent successes of the Oman Sail project include Khamis Al Anbouri becoming the first Omani to win the Extreme Sailing Series, a top international sailing event against some of the world's best sailors. Oman Sail has also had teams compete in the Route du Rhum, one of the world's most gruelling offshore races, the 1,000-mile, 10-leg Tour de France à Voile, which saw Omani's make up 50% of the 14-strong crew, as was also the case in the inaugural Sailing Arabia – The Tour and the Indian Ocean 5 Capes Race. And not forgetting Ahmed Al Ma'amari and Abdullah Al Busaidi – who became the first ever Omani sailors to race around the world as part of the Clipper Round the World Race.





Through long-term planning and a strategy that is built on creating a legacy for future generations, not just acquiring silverware and trophies, the team has truly put Oman on the map. For many of our Omani sailors, competing in international events provides the opportunity for their first overseas visit, providing invaluable life experience, and the opportunity to promote Omani culture globally. Nasser Al Mashari, who made his debut as a full time crewmember in 2011 flying the Omani flag on board the Extreme 40 Oman Air, is an example of how Oman Sail is providing opportunity and inspiration to the nation's countrymen and women.

Nasser has experienced first-hand the impact of Oman Sail on awakening international interest in his homeland. Speaking after an Extreme 40 event in Qingdao, China, Nasser said: "The media here are really interested in Oman and how we are using the Extreme Sailing Series to promote the country. When we arrived, people here in Qingdao were coming up to us and asking about the branding on the boat and they wanted to learn more about our country. That really makes me so proud."

He continued: "For us the series is more than a sporting event – it is an opportunity for me to represent my country and raises the profile of Oman in the rest of the world. It is putting Oman on the map. I am so proud to be part of that – it is an incredible responsibility to have but also an amazing opportunity and one that I am privileged to be part of."

"The Oman Sail project is about much more than producing sporting results in international events, it is about engaging the country and teaching the youth of our country a wonderful sport that can inspire confidence and independence as well as teaching new skills. It is also about educating the countries we visit about Oman and teaching them about the Omani culture."

The Ministry of Tourism supports Oman Sail, and so in 2010, when our national carrier, Oman Air, came onboard as title sponsor to Oman Sail's 105ft trimaran, Oman Air Majan, the partnership aligned Oman Air, Oman Sail and the Ministry of Tourism's marketing strategies in Europe. All three took an active role in the promotion of Oman Air Majan's participation in the Route du Rhum, but also the promotion of Oman on the international stage to attract tourism, business and trade to Oman.

Oman Air Majan's entry in the Route du Rhum captured the imagination of supporters around the world who followed the race online, and flocked to the race village for the race start in St Malo, France, exposing Oman Air and Omani culture to 1.2 million members of the public.

As well as its overseas profile-building, Oman Sail is also now regularly welcoming the best international sailing talent to Omani waters - Oman Sail is not only competing in world-class sailing events, they are creating them so people all around the globe can sail on the beautiful waters off of Oman's coastline.

The Extreme 40 Sailing Series is becoming a regular visitor to Muscat, while Al Mussanah Sports City, home to the second Asian Beach Games, has become the site of the Sultanate's first annual world-class dinghy regatta – Mussanah Race Week. In 2011, Oman Sail's Sailing Arabia – The Tour, was the first international sailing regatta that joined together the nations of the Gulf and attracted a top sailing team from France to enter the inaugural race.

The value of hosting top international sailing regattas is enormous in terms of new visitors coming to Oman and the global media exposure the events guarantee for the Sultanate. Converting that peak of tourist activity into a sustainable maritime industry for Oman and has economic benefits for the whole country is the long-term goal.

Oman Sail promotes the Sultanate as a unique, sophisticated and distinctive tourist destination around the world so making visiting teams, media, corporate guests and public visitors feel welcome and them experiencing the Oman they expect is extremely important.

As more and more Omanis graduate from Oman Sail's national sailing education program into its international racing teams, and compete on the world's biggest sailing stages, a new generation of sailors will be always ready to follow in their predecessors' footsteps, ensuring the word about Oman continues to be spread globally for years and years to come.

Whilst all this high profile international activity is taking place, Oman Sails national community program is also going from strength to strength, introducing more and more Omani's to sailing. With a target to get 30,000 young girls and boys sailing in five years through their Try Sailing initiatives, Oman Sail now has sailing centres in Muscat and Mussanah, with six in total planned over the next four years.

Oman Sail plans to have 55 trained instructors by 2015.

Instructors who were taught their trade by Oman Sail are now also teaching visitors to Oman to sail and showing off the countries natural beautiful coastline at the five star Shangri-la hotel's sailing centre.

Every step Oman Sail takes on the international, and national, arena, is building a platform upon which Oman's sailing industry can thrive, and through which we can educate the world about our country, for the benefit of generations to come. Oman Sail's ten year plan to which aims to take Omani sailors to the 2020 Olympic Games is turning into a reality. Our young talented dinghy sailors such as Musaab al Hadi, Akram al Wahaibi and Hashim al Rashdi already have their sights set to take on the world at the 2016 Olympic Games.

With Oman Sail's second sailing school having opened its doors at Al Mussanah Sports City, helping Oman Sail broaden its reach to students living outside of Muscat, and an increasing number of Omanis becoming instructors and senior instructors, sailing is fast re-establishing itself at the heart of Oman culture.

The impact of Oman Sail and all the social and economic benefits that come from reconnecting Oman with its maritime heritage are truly starting to shine.

The future is bright, very bright indeed.



Omran - Linking Cultures

Eng. Wael Bin Ahmed Al Lawati
CEO, Omran

Seeing the ripples radiate from a stone thrown into a still pool is a wonderful example of how a single event can transmit energy well away from the source. That's exactly what happened when Oman hosted the 2nd Asian Beach Games at Musannah, in December 2010. As host country, Oman attracted 43 of 45 Asian countries to compete, learn and travel through our country and, like the ripples in the pool, the media coverage and returning athletes took images and stories of Oman to many countries, introducing Oman to many people for the first time.

The event was remarkable from many cultural perspectives. In addition to the event, the greatest change was the transformation for the fishing community of Musannah. In less than two years its adjoining coast became a world-class sports' precinct, complete with a 4-star hotel and apartments for athletes, and a 60-berth marina. It was a case of the world coming to Musannah. A small community embraced people from many cultures. A local coffee shop sign summed it up nicely - World is Welcome.

I am very proud this was Omran's first major project. As the Sultanate's lead agency on tourism development, there is nothing better than contributing to Oman's capability to win and host international events and, in so doing, build cultural understanding and respect. Our entire team shares the same feeling.

In the three months after the Games, Musannah hosted a 100 strong international travel writers' guild meeting and an international sailing regatta. The ripples will continue for many years.

Omran's core business is the so-called 'supply-side' of tourism; we master plan, develop and manage tourism attractions, buildings and precincts. This is critically important as Oman diversifies away from a hydrocarbon economy and looks to build new global business networks. For Oman, tourism is comparatively new and Omran's challenge is to accelerate the delivery of key infrastructure to meet forecast managed tourism demand. It is a role that has strong government backing because it is delivering strategically significant projects that could not otherwise be delivered on the scale, quality and timelines possible from the private investors alone.

Delivering these outcomes requires a multi-skilled Omani team backed by multi-national specialists with a corporate culture that values working with communities, promoting creativity and safeguarding





natural values. In recognition of our Environment Management System & Health & Safety Management System, we have attained ISO 14001 & ISO 18001. We have also completed the requirements for ISO 9001 and now await formal certification. These systems and certificates ensure we work to best international practises and in a consistent manner. Our sponsorship of the International Responsible Tourism Magazine is an example of a commitment to promote responsible and sustainable outcomes internationally. Our recent initiative called “Intajee” which translates to my production is an innovative means in which we have created a local brand for marketing produce from communities that live next to our project sites and developments. This has enabled small farms to gain access to major retail locations and has put local produce within easy access for families to use.

Omran has an extensive portfolio of joint venture projects, most of which are niche resorts in regional areas, with the first stages of the joint venture with Muriya at Jabal As Sifah and the Salalah Beach Resort, both opening in 2011. These will attract more international guests to regional sites, but we are about to throw another stone into the pool and create more ripples.

This is the construction of Oman’s Convention and Exhibition Centre, comprising of a 3,000-seat auditorium, 1,000 hotel rooms of different categories in addition to major exhibition space, business park and mall. This will enable Oman to host regional and international conventions and exhibitions as never before. This capability will induce positive changes to Oman’s current visitor profile, reduce seasonality impacts, and provide Oman with a world-class precinct for business and the arts.

Ahead, there is no lack of government vision and support for step-change projects with the greatest potential net benefit being the government’s decision in July 2011 to begin master planning for Port Sultan Qaboos to become an internationally significant tourism precinct.

Among the many success factors to deliver and manage a globally competitive tourism destination are community acceptance, quality infrastructure and services, and visionary projects that showcase cultural identity and vibrancy. Combined, these can make a powerful step-change national tourism capability and performance for which Omran is marking a valued contribution.





Al Jabal Al Akhdar - Master Planning to Link Cultures

Mohammad Al Sinani

Director General, Planning and Information, Ministry of Tourism

Oman's Western Hajar Mountains are a destination of international significance in natural, cultural heritage and geotourism terms, with Al Jabal Al Akhdar being the most popular destination.

Up until recent times, Al Jabal Al Akhdar was a remote and rarely visited area of Oman, with its high plateau (Saiq Plateau) isolated by its mountainous terrain rising to 3,000m. This changed in the 1990s with the construction of a sealed 4WD access road, which in 2010, increased visitation reaching 98,000 including 45,000 visits by foreign nationalities (up from 35,000 in 2009).

The prospects for on-going tourism growth are high. Al Jabal Al Akhdar is just 2.5 hours from Muscat making it both a day and short-break destination. The area is a year-round destination, unaffected by the heat of summer, and its diverse sub-alpine fauna and flora, including many rare species, expanses of juniper trees, and several birds with restricted habitat, is a unique environment. Finally the area's rich cultural heritage. The region is known for its hanging villages and extensive terraced gardens that give the 'Green Mountain' its name. Over thousands of years, these communities have developed year-round agricultural practices that continue today, in some cases developing crops and fruit trees that are well adapted to a sub-alpine environment. Locally distinctive traditional handicrafts are still practiced.

It is little wonder why Al Jabal Al Akhdar is an emerging tourism destination and there are signs that the community sees tourism as an opportunity with local families developing and managing hotels at Diana's Point with the first of two hotels (Sahab Hotel) now in operation. Tourism apartments have also been developed, while Omran is developing a niche hotel & spa at a remote location.

With high forecast tourism growth, the focus of many agencies and the local community is how to safeguard natural and cultural attributes and values, with the Ministry of Tourism advocating a master plan approach with particular emphasis on reserving and promoting cultural values. To date, the Ministry has prepared the terms of reference for a socioeconomic study to guide and inform development decision-making in order to achieve a culturally sensitive outcome, with the Sultan Qaboos University contracted to carry out the study. The results and information greatly assisted in formulating a vision for tourism development integrating local community aspirations, ambition and sensitivities.

Accordingly, the major objective of the master plan is to revive old culture, so it is passed to new generations and shared with the world through tourism. The Ministry sees this as particularly important as traditional agriculture, unique irrigation systems, organic agriculture and a rich gene pool of fruit, vegetables and livestock are of international significance. As well, the Holy Quraan cites people who sculptured their homes within the mountains, not unlike the Jabals.

Al Jabal Al Akhdar is at a critical stage of 'emergence', so to safeguard and promote heritage, culture and the natural environment with a mix of development activities, a master plan approach that actively involves the community and stakeholders, and that promotes sustainable outcomes is the logical way forward. That's what we are planning for the future.





Hospitality and Tourism Training – Careers Across Culture

Robert MacLean

Principal, National Hospitality Institute, Oman

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the tourism and hospitality sector is the world's largest employer as it generates almost 10% of total GDP. Over 220 million people work in the sector and, by 2019, one in eleven will be employed in the sector. Tourism is gaining increased importance in almost every country, and Oman is no exception.

The nature of the global hospitality industry has changed dramatically. Forget the traditional image of sun-and-sand, and lines of large hotels with tourists on package holidays. It seems that now people don't just go on holiday to relax; recreation has become an opportunity for the springing up of a number of different tourism genres. These range from the reasonably straightforward (adventure tourism, cultural tourism) to the downright bizarre (disaster tourism, space tourism). One new buzzword is eco-tourism as many tourism businesses look to balance tourism growth with local communities, cultures and the environment.

No other business spans countries and cultures like the hospitality industry. Working in tourism offers exciting opportunities for travel, meeting new people, learning how another country operates and perhaps a new language. If you have good communication skills, are hooked on travel and don't mind unsociable hours and relatively low pay when you start out, then the world is your oyster. You do have to have a genuine liking for people and people who have successful careers in the hospitality industry maintain that dealing with people every day is entertaining, interesting and ultimately rewarding.

It is hardly surprising that with the global rise in hospitality and tourism, the biggest issue facing the industry is a skills shortage. There is a growing deficiency of senior managers in the industry, and a large number of workers are required not only in traditional roles such as waiters or chefs but in other more specialized fields. A whole range of sub-industries have sprung up alongside travel and tourism, which offer new employment opportunities. A job in international tourism can mean working in a theme park or on a cruise ship or in a health spa; you can find yourself working as a diving or ski instructor, a safari tour guide, an adventure tour operator or an expert in IT or a business manager.

Yet even if you never leave your native country, working in hospitality raises awareness of other countries and cultures. As visitor numbers to Oman grow, a job in tourism provides a way for young Omanis to gain knowledge and experience of other cultures, and to develop the ability and confidence to deal with people outside their own country. According to the corporate plan for 2011-15 of the





National Hospitality Institute SAOG (NHI), at present over 16,500 people in Oman work in the tourism sector, of whom 48% are Omani. They work mainly in hotel and airline companies, travel agencies, car rental companies and restaurants. By 2015, the number of available hotel rooms is expected to rise from 10,747 to 26,492 and it is estimated that this will create 19,000 new jobs. As Omanisation targets rise to 80% throughout the industry, the majority of these positions will be filled by Omanis.

The Setting Up of National Hospitality Institute SAOG (NHI)

In the 1990s, the Government of Oman recognized the need to promote tourism as one of the key strategies in line with Vision 2020 to diversify the economy. They did so for very good reasons. These were not to promote Oman's lovely beaches and mountains – after all, many countries have these. The driving force behind the decision to promote tourism was to provide jobs for young Omanis. Therefore in 1995, National Hospitality Institute SAOG (NHI) was set up in Wadi Al Kabeer as a public company, many of whom were from the hospitality industry. Today, over 15 years later, NHI has successfully trained over 5000 young Omanis for jobs in the tourism and travel business.

NHI's mission is to design, develop and deliver internationally benchmarked hospitality, travel and tourism programs to create an effective and sustainable local workforce. From the outset, it aimed to be different from other institutes. The intention was to raise awareness among young Omanis about the hospitality industry as a worthwhile career, and create a school where they could learn about the art of service and prepare for work in local hospitality outlets. The main part of NHI business is therefore delivering vocational courses that are linked to jobs. These kinds of programs are funded by the government, but can also be purchased privately. You can train to be a waiter, a housekeeper, a receptionist, a butler or even a tea boy. You can take a course in telephone skills and a course to improve your skills in resolving conflict – very important for customer service. NHI also operates the Gulf Chef School, which provides training to chefs working in restaurants, hotels, airlines, hospitals, banks, cruise ships, banks and industrial outlets. Other divisions are the Food Safety Academy, and the Gulf Travel School, which trains cabin crew.

NHI's courses are on a full and part time basis, and are internationally recognized and accredited with certification from the UK, USA and Canada. Some courses are in English and others in Arabic and Hindi. Programs include a Hotel Management Diploma under the auspices of the Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Lodging Association. Approval has recently been obtained to offer a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Hospitality Management. The courses in Food Safety are at different levels and are certified by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health in the UK, whereas the courses run by the Gulf Travel School are accredited by IATA (International Air Transport Association) and UFTAA (Universal Federation of Travel Agents Association). NHI is currently working closely with government bodies and strategic partners towards gaining college status.

NHI Success Stories

Many of NHI's graduates go on to work in other parts of the world for short or long periods, creating success stories in a variety of fields and countries. Details of over 80 such stories can be found on the NHI website www.nhioman.com. The following are just three examples of the range of talent among NHI graduates, and illustrate how young people with drive and ambition can achieve global success in different areas of the industry.

- **Adil Abdullah Al Balushi** graduated in 2004 with an NVQ Level 2 in Food and Beverage Service. He joined the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Muscat as a Room Service waiter, and moved to the Crowne Plaza a year later, where he was promoted to Captain and then Supervisor. He recently completed two months of cross exposure and training at the Hyde Park Intercontinental Hotel in London. He is aiming to become a Food and Beverage Manager.
- **Mohsin al Balushi** completed a certificate in Travel and Tourism in 2003. He joined Indian Airlines in Customer Service, and in the following years further developed his technical skills with Gulf Air and Jet Airways. He then landed the position of Station Manager for the airline Fly Dubai, responsible for the airline's entire airport operation.
- **Nadiya al Hinai** completed her NVQ Level 2 in Front Office in 2005. She obtained a job at the Shangri-la Bar Al Jissa Resort and Spa, rising through the ranks to gain the position of Service Leader, Front Office at the Al Husn hotel. Nadiya also had four month's work experience at the busy Traders Hotel in Dubai, and has attended the Shangri-la Academy in China. Her ambition is to be a Director of Rooms.

The Way Forward

Oman is at a crucial stage in the development of its hospitality sector. The hospitality and tourism industry has made huge strides over the past 15 years, and the way ahead is exciting and challenging. It will take sustained effort from business leaders, government bodies and major training providers to make the country's hospitality industry as a whole as successful as the stories of many of the individuals it has trained. NHI's corporate plan emphasises that the organisation is keen to capitalise on its excellence and expand its influence, but also that it is 'never satisfied, and must always innovative'. As the plan states, 'We are further committed to linking ourselves to the latest international standards of our business and to ensuring that we are at the cutting edge of innovation'. The training NHI provides young Omanis with qualifications for an exciting and rewarding global career – one that links cultures and promotes much-needed international understanding.



Attractions that Build Cultural Linkages

Mohammed Al Zadjali

Director General, Tourism Development, Ministry of Tourism

The inter-relationship between culture and tourism is well understood in Oman where cultural heritage is central to its national tourism strategy. This focus plays an important role in positioning Oman as a destination and, in doing so, generates fascinating cultural linkages through site visits, exhibitions, research and exchanges between museum professionals.

Oman's investment in restoring historic sites and major buildings and structures is well publicised. This is managed by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, with restored precincts and buildings being managed by the Ministry of Tourism with a focus on maximising the economic and social benefits to local communities.

The portfolio of restored and internationally significant properties is impressive, with the coming year seeing the re-opening of Taqah, Jabreen, Barka and An Nu'man Castles, as well as the Bair ar Rudaayah with a fascinating collection of small arms and accompanying exhibits. Each museum will attract visitors and stimulate local economies. As well, Barka and An Nu'man Castles now add to our day and overnight tour itineraries to the Al Batinah region (Nakhla, Al Rustaq and Al Hazm Castles), as do Jabreen and Bair ar Rudaayah do for touring in the Al Dhakhiliyah Region (Nizwa and Jabreen Castles).

Outside Oman, 2010 saw a step-up in cultural heritage promotions with feature events being the Ministry's sponsorship involvement in the Adornment & Identity – Jewellery and Costume from Oman exhibition that ran from 21 January to 11 September 2011 at The British Museum, London. The Exhibition was viewed by around 250,000 visitors and introduced the Sultanate of Oman to many for the first time.

Another activity was the special edition on Oman by the International Committee of Museums and Collections of Arms and Military History (ICOMAM) magazine. It was the magazine's first edition dedicated to a destination, thus providing the opportunity to summarise several major museum collections and craft skills still practiced.

For ICOMAM's 260 member institutions in 50 countries, the edition was a welcome opportunity to fulfill its objectives to encourage research, stimulate professional standards, promote the interpretation of collections, and encourage networks and partnerships. From the Ministry's perspective, the edition boosted international awareness in the richness and diversity of Oman's museum collections, especially to stimulate interest in related research and exhibitions.

Complementing this, building on the work of ICOMAM Member Dr Christopher Rose on the restoration of artillery cannons at Al Hazm and Barka Castles, and the installation and interpretation of the small arms museum at Bair ar Rudaayah, ICOMAM plans to host its 2012 Congress at Nizwa University, again providing an opportunity for networking and inspections of Oman's forts, castles and associated collections.

A final example of the cultural linkages made possible by tourism is the Oman Cultural Week in Sydney, Australia. The event, under the auspices of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, will run in October 2011, again introducing Oman through traditional dance and music.

More of this work is planned for 2012, with restoration of Muttrah Fort being a priority, along with the ICOMAM Congress.

The British Museum exhibition is detailed at http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/adornment_and_identity.aspx

A copy of the ICOMAM special edition can be downloaded from the Ministry of Tourism's web site www.omatourism.gov.om and www.klm-mra.be/icomam.



Royal Opera House Muscat - Linking Cultures

Iman Al Handawi

General Director, Royal Opera House Muscat

The state-of-the-art Royal Opera House Muscat (ROH Muscat) of the Sultanate of Oman was established by Royal Decree as a multidisciplinary platform for arts and culture. The vision of the organization is to serve as a centre of excellence in global cultural engagement showcasing the world's best artistic and cultural expressions and promoting dialogue across civilizations. The mission of this first opera house of the Arabian Gulf is to enrich lives through diverse artistic, cultural, and educational programs that engage difference and promote timeless values.

The newly-completed ROH Muscat building is a fusion of Omani tradition and modernity. This iconic landmark with stunning handmade ornaments will serve as a world-class performing arts venue and a source for creativity and innovation. The multidisciplinary work of ROH Muscat will showcase rich and diverse artistic creations from Oman, the region, and the world; provide a space for culture and socioeconomic development reflection and actions domestically and internationally; inspire audiences and nurture creativity with innovative programs; foster cultural vitality and unleash talent; sustain livelihoods through the arts and cultural tourism; and put cultural diplomacy into practice by reinvigorating global collaborations and exchanges.

The highly-anticipated Grand Opening and Inaugural Season of ROH Muscat will showcase unprecedented performances, from 12 October to 31 December 2011. The superb lineup of artistic and cultural events will engage diverse audiences domestically, regionally, and globally in the groundbreaking public diplomacy strategy and cultural development path established by the wise vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The artistic program of ROH Muscat's Inaugural Season will focus on opera productions, ballet performances, and music concerts. The production of two operas: "Turandot" and "Carmen", has been specially commissioned for and is owned by ROH Muscat. For the Grand Opening Day, the legendary Maestro Franco Zeffirelli will direct the production of Giacomo Puccini's last masterpiece, "Turandot", featuring the Arena di Verona Orchestra, Chorus, and Ballet. Later, the world-renowned Gianni Quaranta will direct George Bizet's "Carmen".

The American Ballet Theater, accompanied by the world-renowned State Hermitage Orchestra, will make its first trip to the region to perform "Don Quixote". Other exceptional and historic ballet





performances include: “Giselle” by world-class Teatro Alla Scala Ballet, accompanied by the Accademia Alla Scala Orchestra; “Shim Chung – The Blind man’s Daughter” by the Universal Ballet of Korea; and the popular “Swan Lake” by the Mariinsky Ballet accompanied by the Mariinsky Theatre Symphony Orchestra.

An Opera Gala will feature Maestro Plácido Domingo and the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, with the participation of the gracious dancer Nuria Pomares. Others will feature renowned soprano Renée Fleming and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, music concerts featuring the world’s greatest living cello player Yo-Yo Ma with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the incredible Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and many more. Performances by Arab cultural icons will showcase the living monument, the acclaimed Diva Riham Abdul Hakim accompanied by Selim Sahab Arab Music Ensemble to pay a tribute to Umm Kulthum; and the Tarab wonder and United Nations Goodwill Ambassador, Magida El Roumi.

In addition to the artistic content, the program of the inaugural season will also include intellectual exchanges that will highlight the importance of dialogue and candid debate among arts and culture stakeholders. In collaboration with The Aspen Institute, the ROH Muscat – Aspen Creative Arts World Summit will be organized under the theme of Arts in Motion. The Summit will be the first meeting of its kind: it will bring influential media, arts, culture and socioeconomic development professionals and organizations together to discuss the challenges of creativity and the extent to which they enhance or undermine innovation and public participation in cultural life and sustainable development.

The Summit theme of Arts in Motion will reflect shifting trends in the interpretation, presentation, and consumption of diverse artistic and cultural expressions in an interconnected world, the impact of social technologies, the status and mobility of young professionals, the emergence of new cultural markets, and the contribution of the arts to socioeconomic development and social change.

The exceptional quality of artistic and cultural productions of ROH Muscat will enable the organization not only to measure up to the artistic excellence expected from prestigious arts and culture venues around the world, but also to go beyond current programming practices by traditional performing arts facilities. Certainly, the range, diversity, and multidisciplinary character of the work of ROH Muscat will reflect cultural and socioeconomic development challenges and opportunities that ROH Muscat seeks to address when considering the educational and professional development needs of the country, promotion of tourism, and the global quest for cultural stewardship and cooperative engagement.





Building Cultural Awareness

Khalid Al Zadjali

Exhibitions and Cruise Shipping, Ministry of Tourism

I want to use the opportunity provided by the World Tourism Day theme to cover a number of cultural awareness programs run in Oman by the Ministry of Tourism.

Cultural awareness education is important to any tourism strategy. First, a large body of that people-to-people interaction has the greatest impact on visitor experience and satisfaction. Small gestures of welcome and assistance leave beneficial impression on visitors. Oman boasts that the warmth of its hospitality is greater than other Arabic destinations, and this needs to be demonstrated.

Cultural awareness programs also promote the value of tourism to Oman, and allow Omanis to learn from our visitors and consider employment in the sector. This is a really important point because tourism offers employment opportunities in all areas of our country; it is an industry that is limited largely by the capacity of our people to seize the opportunity.

For these reasons, the Ministry has assumed a parallel obligation to promote awareness in other countries and cultures through a mix of educational activities with examples being:

- An annual schools' education program with presentations to around 40 schools and colleges. This is an informative session that covers the value of tourism to Oman, major tourism interests, visitor expectations, how to meet and greet visitors, as well as proving information sources.
- Conferences and events hosted in Oman, which can also provide industry and student participation. For example, the up-coming 3rd Global Geotourism Conference (30 October to 1 November 2011) will also operate as an industry development program for tourism students and stakeholders.
- Cultural events, with the two landmark events being the Muscat Festival (January-February) and the Salalah (July) Tourism Festival. Both events showcase Oman's culture.
- An annual performing arts program that's staged in Muscat and Salalah from November to March, now firmly established as one of Oman's hallmark events.

The annual theatre program provides an opportunity for the public to experience performing arts from around the world. Performing arts involve national dress, dance and song, so each performance is a powerful learning experience. For example, a Georgian Folk Music performance with striking national

dress, songs and dance contrasts with other performances over the season to add further depth and dimension. The lasting positive impact is the richness of cultural diversity.

The success of the theatre program speaks for itself. The theatre season runs from November/December to February, and may involve up to eight performing groups from the west and east. The performance program is advertised in Arabic and English newspapers and entry is free to encourage family involvement.

In Muscat, the performances are staged at the Al Felajj Castle Theatre, an impressive venue that seats around 500 people beside an 18th century castle. The Theatre is about 80 km west of Muscat with the Hajar Mountains behind. The Castle also hosts its own garden, so the setting is richly Omani. In Salalah, performances are staged at the Al Murooj Theatre, a large modern open-air theatre in the city.

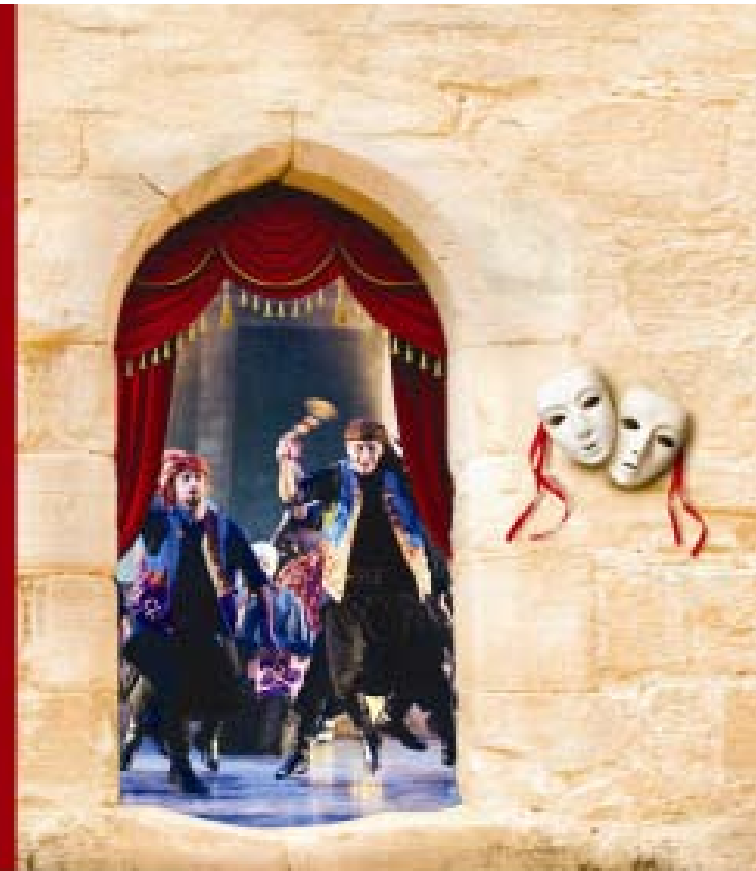
The Ministry is reviewing the performance program to extend performances to our major cities including Sohar, Nizwa and Sur.

Experience Jordan's finest musical art

9 February 2011

8:30 pm Wednesday

Al Murooj Theatre, Salalah



A rich blend of cultures





Ocean Blue International Charter Company Linking Cultures

Clara Zawawi

Chairperson, Ocean Blue International LLC

Ocean Blue International was founded to allow our guests who come from all over the world to experience the beauty and history of the Muscat coastline from the deck of one of the most sophisticated day charter vessels available. The initial research and business plan that we used to establish the business identified that a key component to the success of a marine tourism business was that the vessel be internationally recognized and built and operated to international IMO standards; thus looking at the most popular and practical vessels, the French made Fontaine Pajot catamaran emerged as the obvious answer.

A multicultural approach also continues to contribute towards our success. While many of our guests wish to experience the natural beauties of our environment by swimming and snorkeling in Bandar Khairan, our most popular cruise is still our Forts and Palaces experience during which we take an informative guided tour of the Muscat coastline from Bandar Jissah or Marina Bandar al Rowdha past the forts of Jelali and Mirani; wonderful examples of Portuguese architecture built upon Omani fortifications; the Al Ahlam Reception Palace and then the bustle of Muttrah Harbour with the souq and the modern Cruise Ship Terminal.

The impulse to bring our Omani culture to our international guests, who come from countries such as Europe, UK and even the United States and Australia has continued to fuel our expansion. Our 'Bait al Bilad', the Village House in Qantab, is purely devised to allow international guests to experience an authentic piece of Omani village culture. Through music, food and other cultural experiences such as henna painting, our guests have an opportunity to, for a short time, really experience what it is like to be within an Omani village. As part of our employment drive and to really produce an authentic experience, much of our food and many of our artifacts are provided to us by the ladies of the village who are happy to meet our guests and serve their food.

This is not as easy as it may first appear and has pushed our multicultural approach to new levels. For example, most Europeans have no idea how to experience Omani food - they have no previous knowledge of 'what goes with what' on the plate, what tastes to combine and how therefore to best enjoy their food. So our menus have been carefully devised to suit a European palate without

compromising Omani traditional flavours. These are but a few of the issues that need to be considered within the bounds of a tourism operation to provide an authentic experience.

The cross-cultural approach has benefited us all even within the organization. Our French captain has trained several Omani crew on various aspects of sailing and boat management; and each year we travel to new places around the globe to experience the best practice in tourism management and bring it home to Oman. Thus we offer meals that are served in the way that they might be on the Cote d'Azur; our safety briefings are of the standards set in Australia; our on board tour presentations are influenced by those of Malta and Gibraltar and our sea creature identification charts (given to children on board) are developed from those available in Hawaii.

As a business, our core strength is that we are committed to the development of Oman's tourism industry and to provide a world-class visitor experience to the highest standards available. Our global customers deserve nothing else.





Musandam Peninsula – A Giant of a Destination

Tomy P.V.

Khasab Travel & Tours

The Sultanate of Oman is the second largest country on the Arabian Peninsula, with total land area of 300,000 km² and a population of 2.7 million. The Musandam Peninsula forms the northern most tip of Oman, stretching claw-like northwards with towering mountains and separated from the rest of Oman by the United Arab Emirates.

Due to its geographical position, mountainous terrain and its isolation from the rest of Oman, the region developed at its own pace. It has its own regional dialect and folk music, and many aspects of traditional life can be seen at the many remote fishing villages situated in sheltered fjords (Khors). Although graded roads across the mountains have now made the region more accessible, Musandam's grandeur is best explored by sea. It has many sheltered khors, some connected to the mainland by narrow cliffs. The khors are lined by towering cliffs that are magnificently reflected in the mirror-like waters.

The coast juts into the Strait of Hormuz and extends some 600km with a total population of around 30,000, with the capital (Khasab) having around 18,000 inhabitants. Musandam is divided into four wilayats: Khasab, Bhuka, Dibba and Mudha.

Bringing Tourism to Musandam

Khasab Travel and Tours started in 1992 by Abdul Khaliq Ahmed from Khasab. Abdul wanted to use his knowledge of the area and his interest in nature and history to establish a tour company that shares the beauty of the area and its culture using a fleet of dhows, as well as jeeps, kayaks, buses and local apartment accommodation.

This activity, along with the efforts of other companies, has changed Khasab to one of increasing involvement in tourism. There are several factors behind this change, but underlying all of these are government policies to stimulate tourism which has positively influenced actions such as the:

- Development of 4-star hotels and 5-star resorts in Khasab and Dibba.
- Improved Muscat-Khasab Fast ferry services to/from Muscat. The growth in passenger arrivals from Muscat by air and fast ferry is impressive, with air traffic doubling from 2005 to 2010 with around 11,000 arrivals.
- Improved Muscat-Khasab air services, fast ferry arrivals (250 passenger capacity per service) are expected to deliver far higher arrivals in the year ahead

- The growth in cruise ship visits.
- Streamlined border formalities.

As a result, tourism in Musandam has benefited from growth in larger Oman, UAE short-stay residents, holidaymakers, as well as stop over passengers from Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi International Airports. The growth prospects remain strong, underpinned by growing investment in resorts and hotels, and transport links.

Khasab's growth as an iconic gateway for regional and international tourists is boosting cultural linkages. Locally, more Omani families look to tourism for employment, and our company's activities are making a major contribution in this area. Our dhow captains and crew, as well as our tour guides are local Omani families that, a generation ago, mostly depended on inshore fishing. Local Omani families now have the opportunity to consider careers and tourism operations and management.

A dhow cruise or 4WD tour is also an opportunity for visitors to listen and learn from Omanis who describe Musandam's heritage and its culture. Also, hosting people from so many countries who marvel at Musandam's beauty has strengthened the community's respect for their environment and cultural heritage, and many tours end with a visit to Khasab Castle, which includes an award-winning exhibit on Musandam's marine environment and history.

Tourism has led a remarkable transition for Khasab and Musandam. The region is now seeing internationally acknowledged resort brands now looking to establish in Musandam, beginning with Six Senses Zighy Bay Hideaway at Dibba. More resorts are now under construction in Khasab, and these will position Musandam as a niche destination. This transition now sees daily visitor arrivals by road, air and ferry from a wide range of countries, all to see what is so special about Musandam and its people.





Learning from Visitors

Mussallem Hassan Al Mahari
Dhofar Tour Guide, Mark Tours

The growth of global tourism and its importance as an instrument for world peace and cross culture dialogue has never been as significant. Tourism is a journey undertaken by one to discover what is different, and to learn firsthand about cultures and people. It is a process of learning and re-learning. Tourists were once regarded as aliens who encroached on your lives unnecessarily. They were viewed with suspicion. But now they are more than welcome and make a significant contribution to a country's economy.

Mark Tour's strong growth over 20 years is attributed largely to its culture of listening to and learning from its customers and then incorporating the feedback into its products. This is a culture that has enabled it to enhance visitors experience by providing him what he really requires. It is the avowed policy of Mark Tours to hone the skills of its guides and to fine tune them to acquire the ability to listen to the tourists, to understand their needs, their nuances, their experiences and eventually learn from them what it is, that endears them to a destination.

This feedback is used by the Management in reviewing policies and products. For us at Mark Tours, learning from the visitor is the ultimate achievement of a completed tour. We strongly believe that conversations are an excellent method for research, and being friendly with the tourist really opens them up. We instill in our tour guides with the need to be friendly and to care for tourists. Tourists sometimes want to know how much you care and not how much you know. Genuine caring requires listening to and learning from what visitors have to say.

Oman is blessed with a wide variety of natural bounty and it is because of this diversity of nature that Oman is growing into a much sought after destination. Another asset of Oman is its friendly and hospitable people who make it stand out from the rest of the region. In spite of its natural drive towards modernity, Oman has managed to retain its cultural and traditional values and this is another attraction that endears Oman as a destination to overseas visitor.

The governate of Dhofar is an important tourism region. The Sultanate is making concerted efforts to increase tourism into Dhofar. Significant infrastructure development is in place to provide a springboard for tours to pristine sandy beaches, lush green wadis, mountain ranges, the Empty Quarter, the Frankincense trail, and archaeological sites are significant for tourism. Salalah is the



Relax in Oman this summer.

From July to September, Dhofar (Oman's southern region), celebrates the Salalah Tourism Festival. Revel in the rich cultural heritage as the Khareef turns the mountains lush green, with cascading waterfalls making their way to the sea.

Take it easy in Dhofar. Book today.

Oman Air flies daily to Salalah.

Beauty has an address

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www.visitoman.ae | www.visitoman.be | www.visitoman.com.au





capital of the Dhofar region and a gateway to wonderful sights and sounds that the region possesses and has in store to offer its visitors.

Salalah attracts visitors year-round, but is particularly the most sought after city of the Middle-East during July to September when the region experiences the annual monsoon. People from the Middle East flock into Salalah to escape the blistering heat of summer and to relax, unwind and experience the beautiful nature of this region. We learn from visitors that the best way to enjoy this season is to pack some food and drive your family up the green mountains, find a good spot and lay down your mats. Enjoy the rest of the day interacting and making up for the lost family time. Indulge in conversations and relish your food while the surrounding landscape and weather drifts you away and makes you a part of its culture.

Mark Tours understands the tourism significance of Dhofar and has made its own efforts to market this destination, and is well positioned to meet all visitor requirements. One of our senior tour guides is Mussallem Hassan Al Mahari. He says, "I live two cultural lives – one of a 'Jebali' and the other of a 'Bedouin'. I've lived most of my life as a nomad in the mountains and the desert of Dhofar region. My interest in tour guiding arose at a small age as I felt that Dhofar always possessed the qualities of a great tourist destination".

Mussallem is a seasoned guide who loves to interact with the visitors, and learn from them what they would essentially like to do in Dhofar. He has been guiding groups, FIT's and doing offshore excursions for cruise ships. Although cruise passengers can be bound by time constraints, he has always been able to meet their tour needs. Most of them would prefer to be driven to the Empty Quarter, and for a while would like to abandon civilization and be with nature. Others can see the Frankincense Trail and visit Sumhulam, once a thriving port for Frankincense, see frankincense trees in Wadi Dawkah and also learn about the history of Frankincense from the Balid Museum. Musallam has discovered his guests mostly like to experience the local culture and mingle with the Jebali's (mountain people) for instance. He takes visitors to one of the mountain villages so they can interact with the villagers who offer a meal of camel meat and milk. For visitors not bound by time, camping and camel trekking in the Empty Quarter for a few days to re-live Wilfred Thesiger's experience is a highlight for many.





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