Berlitz

OMAN

POCKET GUIDE

TOP 10 ATTRACTIONS



NAKHAL FORT

A soaring structure in the Western Hajar Mountains. See page 50.



SULTAN QABOOS GRAND MOSQUE

A beautifully designed and decorated contemporary mosque with a capacity for 20,000 worshippers. See page 38.



AL HOOTA CAVE

Spectacular underground formations. See page 45.



BAIT AL BARANDA

This excellent museum traces Muscat's history. See page 33.



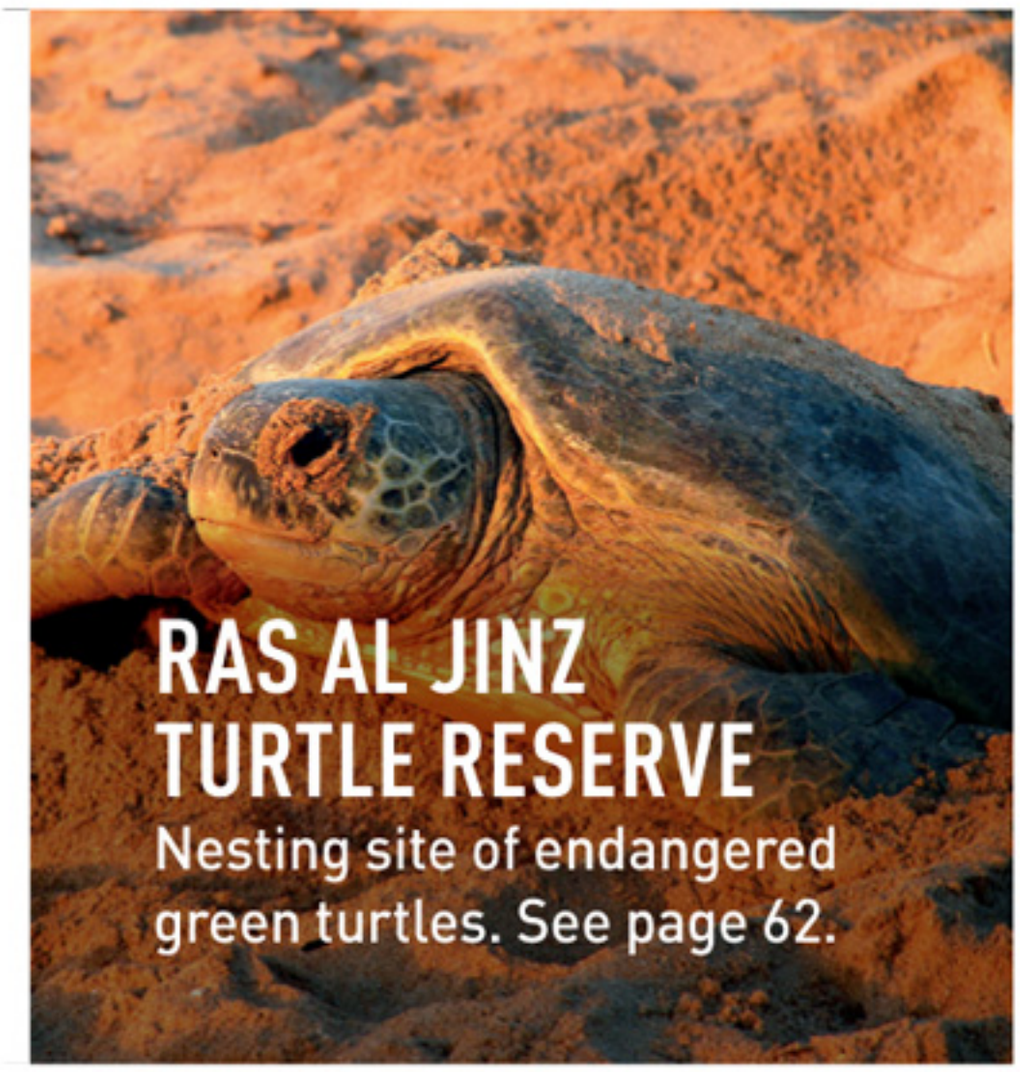
DHOW CRUISE

Enjoy tranquil bays and stunning views.
See page 79.



LAND OF FRANKINCENSE MUSEUM

A fascinating and fragrant history. See page 67.



RAS AL JINZ TURTLE RESERVE

Nesting site of endangered green turtles. See page 62.



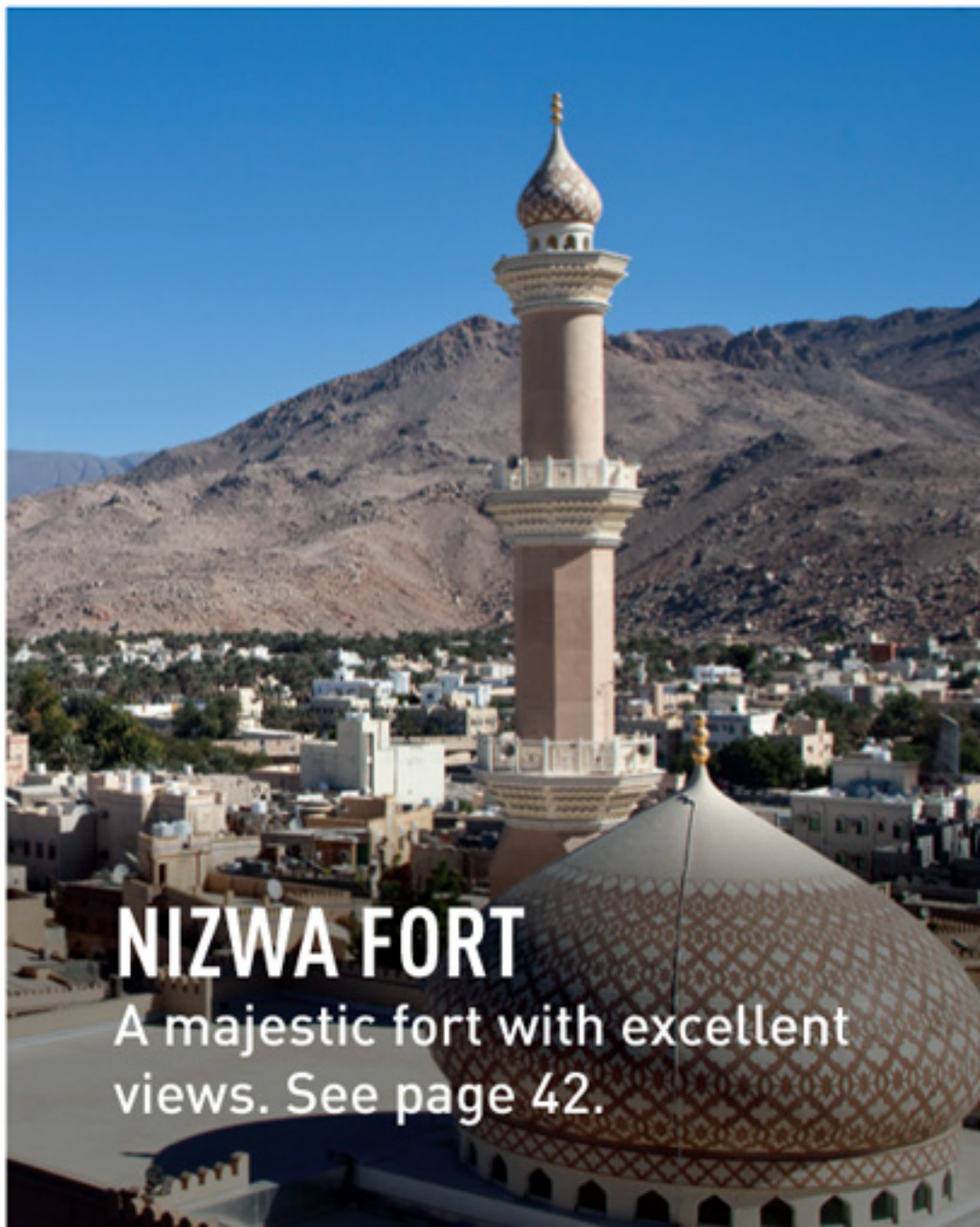
SUMHURAM

The site of an ancient port in a beautiful setting on the banks of Khawr Rawri creek. See page 72.



MUTRAH CORNICHE AND SOUQ

The exotic sights, sounds and smells of an authentic Arabian souq. See page 33.



NIZWA FORT

A majestic fort with excellent views. See page 42.

A PERFECT DAY





8.00am

Breakfast

Join the power-walkers and joggers for an early-morning stroll along the quiet beach at Shati al Qurm, followed by a well-deserved outdoor breakfast at D'Arcy's in Jawaharat a'Shati Complex.

9.30am

A mosque visit

Visit the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque for a look around this beautifully constructed and exquisitely decorated building, one of the most famous in Arabia. Women must remember to take a scarf to cover their heads.

11.00am

Local history

Head for Mutrah and spend an hour at Bait al Baranda, a fascinating history museum. Have a hot drink at the Kargeen Caffe before moving on.

12 noon

Coastal drive

Drive along the sweeping corniche and through the Muscat Gate into Old Muscat. Admire the facade of the Sultan's Al Alam Palace and take in the latest art exhibition at Bait Muzna Gallery.

1.30pm

Scenic lunch

Drive down the coast to the world-famous Al Bustan Palace Hotel for a superb buffet lunch. The Al Khiran Terrace restaurant offers indoor or outdoor dining with stunning views along the coast, and features 'live cooking stations' for personal freshly cooked dishes.

IN MUSCAT





6.30pm

A short stroll and an aperitif

Disembark and walk along the Corniche for early-evening drinks on the tiny top-floor terrace of the Marina Hotel. Enjoy fabulous views along Mutrah Corniche to the fort and beyond.

4.00pm

Dhow cruise

Return to Mutrah Corniche to board a pre-booked sunset dhow cruise. Glide out of the harbour and along the coast into the bay of Old Muscat, often accompanied by dolphins, and take in views of the Sultan's Palace and the Portuguese forts of Al Mirani and Al Jalali.

10.00pm

Late-night jazz

Take a taxi back through town to the Park Inn at Al Khuwayr for some late-evening live jazz or lounge music at its laidback Sama Terrazza rooftop bar. Enjoy extensive night-time views towards the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

8.00pm

Dinner with a view

Reserve a table at La Brasserie, next door to the Marina Hotel, for exquisite French cuisine specialising in fish dishes. This small restaurant is spread over three floors, with the upper terrace having great views across the harbour and fish market.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 10

A BRIEF HISTORY 15

WHERE TO GO 27

Muscat 27
Old Muscat 28, South of Old Muscat 31, Mutrah 32, Ruwi 35, Qurm 36, Madinat as Sultan Qaboos 37, Al Khuwayr 38

Nizwa and the mountains 41
Muscat to Nizwa 41, Nizwa 42, Around Nizwa 44, Al Hamra region 44, Ibri and Bat 48

Sohar and Batinah Coast 49
Batinah coast 49, Sohar 52, Wadi Jizzi 54

Sur and the East 57
Muscat to Sur 57, Sur 60, Turtle-watching 61, The Eastern Hajar Mountains 63, Wahibah Desert and beyond 64

Salalah and Dhofar 65
Salalah city 66, West Salalah 69, East Salalah 71

Musandam 75
Getting to Musandam 76, Khasab 76, Scenic coastal drive 77, Dhow cruise 79, Mountain tour 80

WHAT TO DO 83

Sports and outdoor activities 83
Entertainment 89
Shopping 91
Activities for children 94

EATING OUT 97

A–Z TRAVEL TIPS 113

RECOMMENDED HOTELS 134

DICTIONARY 142

INDEX 174

FEATURES

The *falaj* water system 17
Historical landmarks 25
The C38 trail 33
Nizwa livestock market 43
Sindbad the sailor 53
Recreating Sindbad's voyage 59
The frankincese trade 73
Dive sites of Oman 85
Calendar of events 96
Ramadan 98
Omani food 101

INTRODUCTION

Oman's potential as a tourist destination is still unfolding, but all the right ingredients are here: unspoilt landscapes, wonderful beaches, a rich culture and friendly people. Oman occupies the southeastern corner of the Arabian peninsula, straddling the Tropic of Cancer along the coast of the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. It has land borders with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and an area of just over 300,000 sq km (115,800 sq miles), making it slightly larger than Italy. Recent figures show that Oman has a population of some 4,741,305 people; a dramatic increase from the December 2010 census which showed a total population of 2,694,094, with the majority living in Muscat or along the Batinah Coast enjoying year-round sunshine. Foreigners (mostly guest workers) account for 12.5 percent of the population.

VARIED LANDSCAPES

One of your first impressions of Oman will be the vast stretches of colourful flowers that line the sweeping highways. Armies of imported workers tend the millions of petunias, marigolds, bougainvillea and oleander that offer pleasant urban driving. Beyond the city limits is a good network of coastal roads giving access to the cooler mountainous interior. Ample groundwater flows from these mountains providing 90 percent of requirements, distributed

Frankincense

There are over 300 types of incense trees, but the best-quality frankincense comes from the tree *Boswellia sacra*, known as silver frankincense. It grows abundantly in the Dhofar region, as does myrrh, of which *Commiphora myrrha* produces the best quality.

through the ancient system of *falaj* water channels, numbering around 40,000 – the longest of which is almost 10km (6 miles).

More than 2,100km (1,300 miles) of coastline stretch from the strategically important Strait of Hormuz, along the Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean, to the Gulf of Aden in the south. Around the Musandam peninsula in the north and the province of Dhofar in the south, the coast is lined with steep,



Nizwa livestock market

rugged cliffs, interspersed with small sandy bays. Between them is a gentler coastal stretch of shallow bays and sandy beaches, which attract a variety of wildlife, including the endangered green turtle which nests here. In Dhofar, a quirk of nature turns an otherwise searing summer coastline into a cool, misty rain-soaked landscape as the *khareef* monsoon brushes the Arabian peninsula at this one spot between June and September.

The Hajar Mountains stretch from the border with the UAE for some 500km (310 miles) down to Sur, rising to over 3,000m (9,800ft) in the Jabal Akhdar (Green Mountain) massif at the centre of the range. The verdant mountain-tops and deep wooded valleys shelter a rich variety of flora and fauna.

The coastline between Muscat and the UAE border is the flat wide Batinah coast, dotted with impressive castles and large irrigated farms. South of Muscat towards Sur is a more rugged landscape of unbroken grey-sand beach, lapped by a gentle sea



The exquisite beach at Salalah

– yet the plain, never more than a kilometre wide, is still extensively cultivated, particularly with date plantations.

Beyond lies the stark, inhospitable landscape of Wahibah and the Empty Quarter deserts. But the desert is also a great preserver, with valuable oil reserves lying below the surface, waiting to be discovered. Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) controls almost all of Oman's oil industry and employs the second-largest number of workers after the government.

LAND OF TRADITIONS

Modern Oman is embracing responsible tourism and is fast gaining a reputation as a destination for the discerning tourist wanting quality hotels, good food and adventure. The varied terrain and coastline offer unlimited adventures – 4x4 thrills in the gorges and deserts; mountain trekking; scuba-diving in clear seas teeming with fish; dhow sailing and plenty more besides.