



AZAMARA
CLUB CRUISES®
YOU'LL *love* WHERE WE TAKE YOU®

PORT EXPLORER



MUSCAT

OMAN

Oman is situated on the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Surrounded by striking mountains on one side and soft sandy shores along its coasts, Muscat is an ancient town, characterized by a unique civilization reflecting both Arabian and Islamic influences.

For the past two centuries the capital of Oman has been Muscat. It has been the capital since the third Al Bu Said ruler established his residence there in the 1780s. Muscat, from Arabic masquat, means “the cliffs.” The city is aptly named for the sheer brown-black cliffs that form its inland boundaries. Flanking the rocky coves around which the city is built are the two Portuguese forts, Jelali and Merani, which give Muscat a medieval and romantic appearance. It is a friendly port that has retained many of the traditions and customs that have been followed for centuries on the Arabian Peninsula. The ancient buildings, narrow winding streets, Arabesque gates and beautiful engravings help the city retain much of its medieval charm while blending with the modern commercial and residential quarters, giving the city an ambiance all of its own.

Muscat is often referred to as the “capital region” of the “three cities” – Muscat, Mutrah and Ruwi. Muscat is the heart – the old port area where Sultan Qaboos’ main palace stands within the city walls against the water’s edge. Mutrah is the main trading and residential port area, which lies two miles northwest of Muscat. Muttrah Souq (bazaar) is one of the best in the Arab Gulf States and offers a vast array of Arabian antiques, bright textiles, and exquisite gold and silver jewelry. Inland from Mutrah lies the town of Ruwi, which has grown from desolate land to the financial and business heart of the nation where the headquarters of major international banks serve Oman and lie adjacent to the busy shopping district.

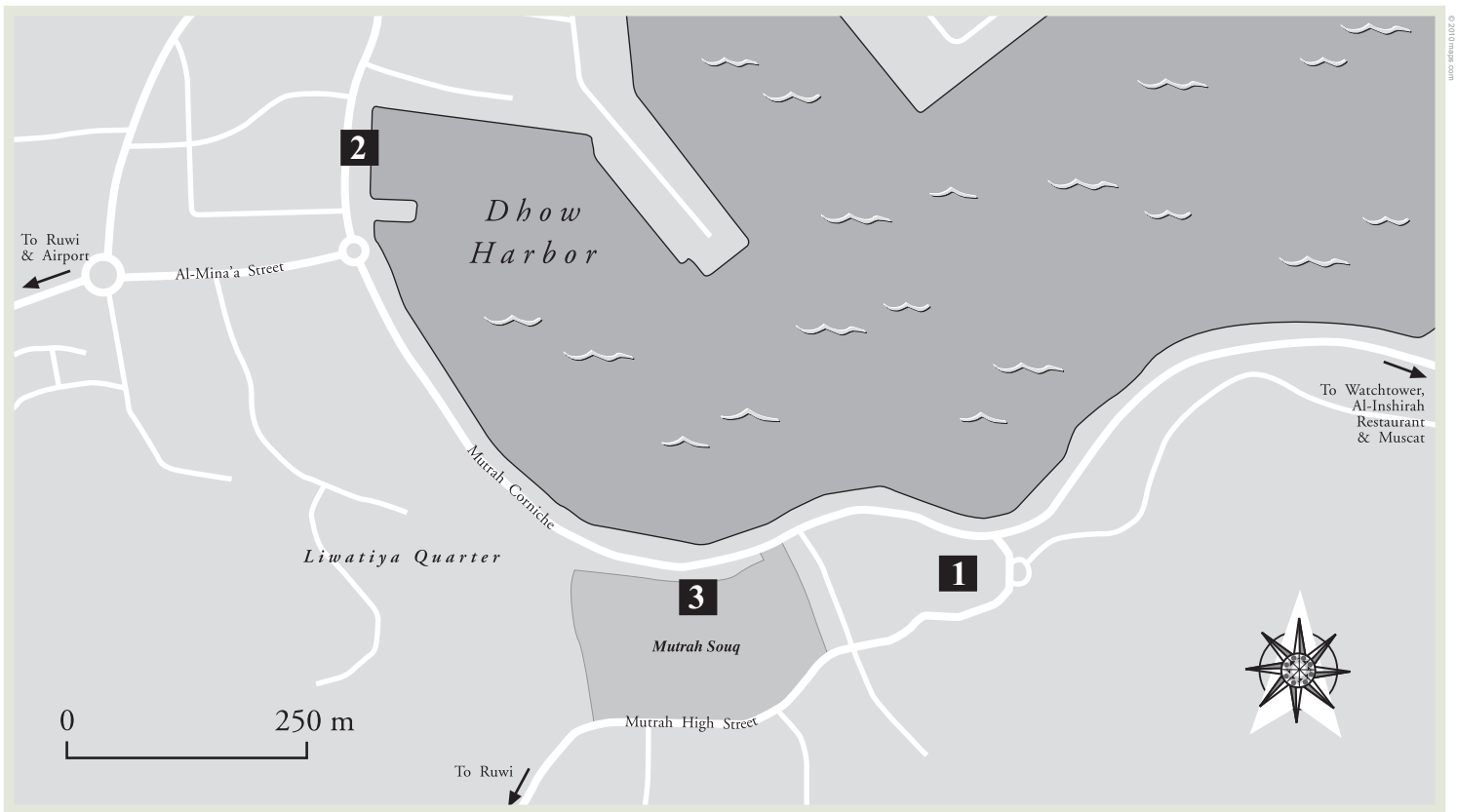


HISTORY

The Gulf States are unique, each having its own special character, history and customs. Oman is the oldest of the established independent Arabian countries with its civilization dating back far as 5,000 years. In biblical times Oman was the hub of the rich frankincense trade. Native Boswellia trees produced a sap from which the exotic incense was derived and became as valuable as gold during the time of Christ. The product was exported to places as far away as Rome before the decline of the trade brought a slow period to Oman’s history.

Muscat gained importance during the 14th and 15th centuries as an outpost for the power kings of Hormuz. It was this role that attracted the Portuguese, who conquered the town during the 16th century to protect their own eastern trade routes. Two centuries later the expanding British Empire pushed the Portuguese out of their many strongholds around the Indian Ocean, establishing a treaty of friendship with Oman.

Since the mid 18th century the city has been the seat of the Al-Busaid dynasty. From the time of the accession of His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos Bin Said in 1970, the Sultanate of Oman has been transformed. Over the last 30 years Oman has pursued modernization and grown from an underdeveloped country to a 20th century state with modern facilities, highways, a university and sport complexes. A major factor is the continuing development of tourism and Oman’s rapidly growing importance as a favored destination.



MUTRAH PLACES OF INTEREST

1 Oman Dive Centre, at Bandar Jussa, where there is a sheltered bay on the brink of the beach with a world class dive centre offering all levels of diving instructions.

2 Mutrah Fish Market - The fish market is at the northern end of the Mutrah Corniche. In addition to fish, meat is also sold here and you will sometimes find shell merchants. The best time to come is early in the morning.

3 Mutrah Souq, is without a doubt the most interesting souq in the Arab Gulf States. There are a dozen or so shops that specialize in antique silver jewelry. Also visit the nearby Spice Souq.

Beyond Central Mutrah

Mutrah Fort - This fort took on more or less its present form in the 1580s during the Portuguese occupation of Muscat. All of the forts are still used by the police and/or military and are closed to the public.

National Aquarium - Muscat has by far the best aquarium in the Gulf. It is south of old Muscat between Sidab and Al-Bustan. All of the specimens on display are native to Omani waters. In addition to fish, crustaceans and coral there is a display of Omani sea shells in the lobby.

Qantab - A small fishing village with a splendid view of the sea.

Souq Al Juma - Popularly known as Friday market, the souq sells new and old items ranging from furniture to cars.

Al Qurm - Known for its elegant shopping malls, the area also has a beautiful National Park where Omani families frequently picnic on weekends.

Omani French Museum - This museum is largely an extended celebration of the sultan's state visit to France in 1989 and the French President Mitterrand's state visit to Muscat in 1992. There are also several galleries detailing relations between the two countries in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Quriyat As one of the major wilayats in this region, the town is an important commercial center and famous for the export of horses, seafood and agricultural products. Nearby is Wadi Dayqah with one of the largest streams on the Arabian Gulf.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Muscat, Mutrah, and surrounding areas, we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult azamarclubcruises.com or contact the onboard Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Most prices are fixed in Oman. This applies to restaurants, hotels and taxis. The only things you can expect to haggle over will be souvenirs in the souq.

Tipping: Tipping is not expected in cheaper places while more expensive restaurants tend to add a service charge to all bills (though this often goes to the restaurant not the waiting staff).

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

There is little in the way of traditional cuisine. Muscat is full of small Indian restaurants where the food is good. Muscat also has a number of up-market Indian and Lebanese restaurants and the usual collection of western-style fast-food establishments, especially fried chicken places. The big hotels offer the usual selection of international fare.

Small restaurants are likely to offer you a choice of little more than Coke, Pepsi or water. Larger restaurants have a wider variety of soft drinks as well as fruit juice, sometimes freshly squeezed. Alcohol is available only in larger hotels and expensive restaurants. Bottled water is recommended.

SHOPPING

The artistic sensibility runs deep in the Omani culture, and can be seen in everything from architecture to Bedouin rug weavings to Omani jewelry. Visitors to the Sultanate can return home with tribal rugs, silver coffee pots, or khanjars, the curved ceremonial dagger worn by Omani men on official occasions. From designer clothing to traditional Omani garments, Oman offers something for every taste. The souqs have handcrafted jewelry and antiques, and a colorful array of products and foodstuffs imported from all over the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Souq merchants expect to haggle, and there are bargains everywhere. The Ruwi souq is a good place for shopping, but it is not exactly a tourist attraction. Like the rest of Ruwi it is a modern creation.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The official currency of the Sultanate of Oman is called the Omani Rial (OMR). One Omani Riyal equals 1000 Baizas. There are notes in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 20 and 50 Riyals. You will also find notes for Baizas in 100, 200, 250 and 500 denominations. Coins in circulation are for denominations of 5, 10, 25, 50, 100, 250 and 500 biazas.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

The GPO is right on the dividing line between Ruwi and Bait Al-Falajat at the northern end of Markaz Mutrah Al-Tijari Street. Muscat's post office is near the Al-Kabir gate.

The telephone office is in Ruwi on Souk Ruwi Street near the intersection with Street 37. Two international call cabins are on the upper floor. You can also send faxes from a desk in the main lobby.

TRANSPORTATION

Muscat's taxis, like all others in Oman, are orange and white. Greater Muscat has two main service-taxi stands for both taxis and minibuses. One is in Ruwi across Al-Jaame Street from the main bus station while the other is out at the Seeb clock tower roundabout, beyond the airport.

The ONTC's system of local busses covers greater Muscat fairly thoroughly. Destinations are displayed on the front of the busses in Arabic and English, but the bus numbers are only in Arabic numerals. The main bus station is on Al-Jaame Street in Ruwi and there is a secondary station by the roundabout near the Mina Hotel in Mutrah.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

Good Morning • Sabah Al Khair
Thank you • Shukran
Good Day • Salamatak Alyum
You're welcome • Ahlan Wa Sahlan/Marhaba
Good Afternoon • Masah Al Khair
Please • Min Fadlik
How much • Kum

