

# WILD FRONTIERS



## Oman Desert Adventure Wahiba Sands & Empty Quarter

Oman is one of Arabia's true gems - a land of rugged coastlines and vast deserts where tradition and progress go hand in hand. This wonderful adventure takes us from the heart of its picturesque capital, deep into mountains and deserts of the Bedu and the old Omani Imamate. We will take in the breathless landscapes of the Hajar Mountains and the shifting sands of Wahiba, explore the old forts of Jabrin and Nizwa and journey into the vast emptiness of the *Rub Al Khali*, the Empty Quarter to the ruins of lost city of Ubar. It is a journey of incredible contrasts, following in the footsteps of the pioneering explorers of old and taking in some of the richest natural and cultural highlights that Arabia has to offer.

### Highlights:

- Explore Oman's picturesque capital and visit the immense Sultan Qaboos Mosque.
- Discover the contrasting landscapes of the Hajar Mountains and Wahiba Sands.
- The fantastic deserts of the Empty Quarter and the Lost City of Ubar.
- The 17th century forts of Nizwa and Jabrin.
- Dhow trip on the Arabian Gulf

'Wild Frontiers are the only group company I have been with and I can't see that changing' *Nicky Kane*

Duration: 11 Days

Average group size: 5 - 12

Start: Thu 27 Dec 12

Finish: Sun 06 Jan 13



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# Why Wild Frontiers?

As a young, innovative company, Wild Frontiers is delighted to have been voted one of the 'Top 10 Tour Operators' by the readers of both Wanderlust and National Geographic Adventure. We are frequently asked what makes us different from other tour operators, and feel that the factors below answer this important question.

**The Traveller's Ethos:** WF is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers, and our ethos is to help adventurous souls get to incredible and inaccessible places in safety and as much comfort as local conditions allow. We are firm believers that travelling is all about the experience and it's the details that make the trip - we specialise in drawing on our own extensive local knowledge and array of contacts to give our clients the very best experience possible.

**Personal Service:** Our London office is manned by experienced expedition leaders and every trip we run stems from their extensive knowledge - in short, we run the kind of trips that as passionate travellers, we like to do ourselves! When you ring our office, you can be guaranteed to chat to someone that knows the trips and the terrain, and is able to offer sound and practical advice.

**Authentic Experiences:** Our unique, original itineraries allow our clients to take journeys that venture beneath the surface of the region. Unlike the plethora of 'world specialists' out there who purport to know a hundred destinations, we concentrate on the locations we know and love. We don't run the same tour over and over, thus running the risk of creating a 'tourist circuit' and spoiling untouched regions. Instead, we rarely run any tour more than a couple of times a year and they are on routes we have discovered for ourselves, meaning we are able to give a truly authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience.

**Be the First:** Our style of travel is all about exploration, and nothing excites us more than opening up new routes to genuine travellers. We keep abreast of new destinations and are often the first to return to places that have vanished from the tourist map. We were the first back into Pakistan after 9/11, the first to return to Kashmir after a decade of tourist isolation, and the first to run a commercial travel trip to Afghanistan for almost 30 years. Since then we have helped bring Colombia, Yemen and Georgia back into the tourist fold, specialising in groundbreaking reconnaissance trips and imaginative expeditions.

**Small Group Size:** We believe it is imperative to keep the group sizes small. Most trips are limited to a maximum of approximately 12 travellers, thus giving you more access to fragile cultures, better opportunities to interact with local people, and the knowledge you are making less of an impact while there.

**Cost of Tours:** We believe in an honest, upfront pricing system so you know exactly what the tour will cost before you book. We avoid local payments, 'optional extras' or forcing our clients to split every meal bill. Our tours are provided on a predominantly full board basis, with mineral water, government permits, entrance fees and transport all included.

**Added Value:** We aim to give our clients the very best (not the least expensive) experience through whatever facilities are available to us. We always try to provide accommodation that is interesting, characterful and convenient, and transport - another important part of any tour - that is as varied and comfortable as possible.

**Our Clients:** Your companions can make or break a trip, and it's lucky therefore that our clients are our greatest asset. Travelling to remote regions is not for everyone, and as such we tend to attract open-minded travellers looking for genuine experiences, and a desire to reach those hard to get to places.

**Responsible Travel:** Awarded 5 star status by AITO (Association of Independent Tour Operators), responsible tourism has always been an integral part of our company ethos and our adventures are designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. For further details please refer to the RT section on this dossier.



**Day 1: Tour starts in Muscat:** The tour starts this morning in Oman's charming capital. After a chance to freshen up for those who have just arrived, we'll begin with a guided tour of the city. One of Arabia's most picturesque cities, Muscat lies within the protective embrace of a ring of horseshoe mountains that run down into the glittering waters of Muscat Bay. We will visit the city's National Museum and its bustling fish market, before driving along the engaging sea-front to the Al Alam Palace and the 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese forts of Jalali and Mirani. En route back to the hotel we will also have a chance to visit Muscat's renowned Muttrah souk, one of the best in the region. Later this afternoon we will head for the harbour for a two-hour dhow trip along Muscat's rugged and beautiful coast.

*Hotel (L,D)*

**Day 2: Muscat - Jebel Shams:** This morning we will take in the magnificent mosque of Sultan Qaboos, one of the largest in the Arab world, whose grand marble halls are capable of holding some 20,000 people. Continuing out of the city in 4WDs, we will then head towards the Hajar Mountains, following the Batinah coast through the foothills to the picturesque setting of Wadi Bani Awf, and a picnic lunch amongst the hills of Oman's rugged interior. This afternoon we then continue to follow the road up towards the heights of Jebel Shams (the Mountain of the Sun), at over 3,000

metres, one of the highest points on the eastern Arabian Peninsula. Taking in the stunning panoramas of Oman's very own 'Grand Canyon', we arrive at our mountain top camp later this afternoon.

*Fixed Camp (B,L,D)*

**Day 3: Drive to Nizwa via Jabrin, Bahla and Tanuf:** After breakfast we drive down to the oasis city of Nizwa. Once the capital of the powerful Omani Imamate, Nizwa imposing 17<sup>th</sup> century fort and bustling souk provide a wealth of scenic and cultural diversions. We will also visit the impressive fort at Jabrin today, possibly the finest of Oman's 17<sup>th</sup> century fortresses, whose exquisite painted wooden ceilings provide eloquent testimony to the skills of the fort's original builders. Following a brief photo stop to take in the UNESCO World Heritage setting of Bahla Fort after lunch, we will then head back to Nizwa by way of the haunting mud brick village of Tanuf, destroyed by the RAF during the Jebel Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Hotel (B,L,D)*

**Day 4: Drive to Wahiba Sands:** Departing Nizwa this morning, our desert journey takes us on towards the vast, open landscapes of the Wahiba Sands, over 10,000 square kilometres of shifting sands and towering dunes that are home to isolated settlements of semi-nomadic Bedouin. Our journey will take us via the market at Sinaw and the lush green oasis of Wadi Bani Khalid, where we will stop for lunch and take the chance to wash off the desert sand with a refreshing swim in a natural pool. After lunch we then continue into the seemingly endless sea of the Wahiba, driving through an ever changing landscape of colours and contours as we make our way on to our remote desert camp.

*Wild Desert Camp (B,L,D)*

**Day 5: New Year's Eve - Drive across Wahiba Sands to Khaluf:** This morning we will drive out across the shifting sands of Wahiba towards the coast, and the pink shell beaches and white dunes of Khaluf on Oman's eastern coast. Far from being devoid of life, these breath-taking desert landscapes are home to a rich array of wildlife, from the remarkable dew drinking beetles that haunt the predawn desert, to foxes, gazelles and over 100 species of birds. The drive will take four

to five hours and we will stop for lunch along the way, arriving in Khaluf in time to set up camp late this afternoon. As we settle down for another evening under an Arabian sky, our drivers will prepare a delicious al fresco dinner. What better way to see in the New Year!?

*Wild Beach Camp (B,L,D)*

**Day 6: New Year's Day - Drive to Wadi Shwaymiyah:** Today provides an ideal opportunity to make the most of Oman's rugged coastline. A long drive south, from Khaluf to Wadi Shwaymiyah, provides an ample array of viewpoints and photo opportunities, as we pass through a picturesque collection of fishing villages, beaches and wadis en route to tonight's camp. On arrival at Shwaymiyah we set up camp and prepare tonight's dinner, taking in the glorious spectacle of the surrounding landscapes. This will be our base for the next two nights.

*Wild Beach Camp (B,L,D)*

**Day 7: In Wadi Shwaymiyah:** From our beach camp, today will see us driving up into the stunning Wadi Shwaymiyah. Home to some of Oman's most striking scenery, there'll be opportunities for walking, exploration, some swimming and a chance to relax and enjoy the surroundings. There should also be time to meet and trade with the women of the nearby Ash Shwaymiyah village, who are known for their basket weaving.

*Wild Beach Camp (B,L,D)*

**Day 8: Drive to Ubar and the Empty Quarter:** This morning we break camp and head towards the vast emptiness of the Rub al Khali, 250,000 square miles of waterless desert that covers much of the southern half of the Arabian Peninsula. This is the heartland of the nomadic Bedouin, made famous by Wilfred Thesiger in his book 'Arabian Sands'. We will travel by way of Thumrait, a small outpost on the very edge of the haunting landscapes of this 'Mother of all Deserts', and make our way towards the legendary lost city of Ubar. Steeped in myth, Ubar was believed to be the site of the Old Testament city of Irem, but its mysterious whereabouts taunted explorers for centuries. It was finally discovered by Sir Ranulph Fiennes in the late 1980s, following a 24 year search that had begun during his time in Oman with the British Special Forces. We will camp this evening

close to the ruins of this old city.

*Wild Desert Camp (B,L,D)*

**Day 9: Empty Quarter:** This morning we will pay a visit to Ubar, a city that defied the best efforts of Wilfred Thesiger, Freya Stark and Lawrence of Arabia. The city once lay along the old spice routes that snaked their way across these desert tracks and excavations have found evidence of city walls, towers and pottery that dates back some 4,000 years. The Qu'ran recounts how the city (like the biblical accounts of Sodom and Gomorrah) was destroyed as punishment for the wicked and avaricious lifestyles of its population, whilst an Arab historian writing in the 6th century AD declared Ubar one of Arabia's most priceless treasures. Little remains of the city today, but it is a remote and haunting place to visit. Continuing on through the hypnotic landscapes of the Empty Quarter, we will then drive across just a small part of one of the largest sand deserts in the world to our next, and final, camp at Hasham.

*Wild Desert Camp (B,L,D)*

**Day 10: Drive to Salalah via Jebel al Qamar:** The journey on to the coastal city of Salalah today takes us from the desert to the Indian Ocean by way of the barren landscapes of the Qara Mountains. A fascinating journey, it takes in the Jebel Al Qamar (Moon Mountain) and the homelands of the Bait Kathir Bedu, passing groves of frankincense trees and descending by way of the remarkable hairpins of the 'Furious Road'. Carved out of the cliff-face, this incredible feat of civil engineering descends some 400 metres in just 5 kilometres, providing a spectacular and hair-raising drive down towards the beaches and lush palms of Oman's second largest city.

*Beach Villa (B,L,D)*

**Day 11: Tour ends in Salalah:** The tour ends after breakfast today.

*(B)*

#### **Wild Extensions:**

Arrive early to adjust to a new time zone or just to get a feel for the country before your tour starts. Explore the country after your tour on a bespoke Wild Extension or just allow a few days to relax afterwards. Maybe choose all of the above and get cheaper flights mid-week?

**Salalah:** Why not spend a few extra days relaxing on the beaches of Salalah?

Contact the office for extension specifics.

### TOUR DETAILS

**Tour Code:** OMA/A

**Tour price:** All our tours are priced on a LAND ONLY basis, giving you maximum flexibility when deciding how to get to and from your tour.

**Single Supplements:** These are NOT compulsory for any Wild Frontiers tour. Where single supplements are available please note that a single room cannot always be guaranteed for every night of the tour as depending on the destination, rooms may be limited. On this tour we are happy to offer an optional single supplement that will cover you for all nights of the tour.

**NB:** for those nights when we are camping you will get a single tent.

**Flights:** If you would like us to send you a quote for the suggested tour flight (see GETTING THERE) or on any alternative flight that may suit you better, please let us know.

In all cases, for the latest prices, please refer to our website or contact the office.

**Please remember that all Wild Frontiers tour prices mean NO hidden extras, NO local payments or kitty and NO compulsory single supplements.**

### WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- Full services of a Wild Frontiers Tour Leader with local guides and drivers.
- Meal plan as detailed in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner) with mineral water as required.
- All transport as outlined in the itinerary.
- All accommodation
- All entrance fees, as per itinerary

### WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED?

- Visas (if applicable)
- Local airport taxes
- Tips
- Beverages & any costs of a personal nature.
- International Flights
- Airport transfers (unless booking suggested flights through WF office)

### GETTING THERE

For this trip our suggested flights (subject to change) are:

26DEC WY102 LHR-MCT 22:35/09:00+1  
06JAN WY904 SLL-MCT 10:30/12:05  
06JAN WY101 MCT-LHR 14:00/19:05

Key:

LHR - London Heathrow  
MCT - Muscat  
SLL - Salalah  
WY - Oman Air

**NB** If you wish to arrange your own flights you are completely free to do so and in this case we can arrange any transfers or supplementary accommodation that you may require.

Please note that if you are making your own flight arrangements, we recommend that you only purchase flights that are totally flexible and refundable as due to the nature of adventure travel, itineraries can change at any time. For more information, please refer to our booking conditions.

### PRACTICALITIES

**Accommodation** will be in a combination of hotels, a fixed camp, a beach villa and tents.

Any accommodation mentioned in the itinerary are subject to availability and if not available substitutes will be of a similar quality.

**Transport** on this tour is predominantly in 4WDs but also includes a journey on a dhow.

**Trip Grading:**

Adventure Rating ❖❖❖❖❖

Comfort Grade ❖❖❖❖❖  
Fitness Level ❖❖❖❖❖  
Cultural Interest ❖❖❖❖❖

Please note that this grading is an indication only and should you have any concerns please contact the office.

#### **Fitness...**

Anyone in a reasonable state of health, with an open mind and a sense of adventure should be perfectly able to cope with our tours to Oman.

#### **It may sound obvious but...**

Wild Frontiers tours are not always for everyone and it is important to us that the tour you choose is the most suitable. Please therefore take time to read the dossier carefully. All our tours are graded to give an overall picture of the trip but these are only guidelines and you should check the daily itinerary. Should you have any concerns about your ability to partake in any aspect of the tour then please contact the office.

**Insurance:** Insurance that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all tours. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all aspects of a Wild Frontiers trip and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. One such policy is the "Wild Frontiers" policy underwritten by Travel & General Insurance Company plc, which is available to UK and Republic of Ireland residents through our website or via the insurance company direct on 0845 408 0583. Under this policy there are two different levels of cover available and for this trip the minimum requirement would be the Standard policy.

#### **Cover explained:**

**Standard policy:** a comprehensive travel insurance policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers activities, including trekking up to 6,000m. This policy does not provide cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel.

**Elite policy:** provides the same comprehensive level of cover as the

standard policy. In addition the Elite policy also provides cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel. The policy will not provide cover for any claims arising from or relating to the reasons why the FCO is advising against travel.

If purchasing the Elite policy you also have the option to **extend the cover** provided by the policy to include cover for claims arising from a terrorist act in an area where the FCO is advising against travel. You can add this cover to your policy when purchasing online or over the telephone.

These policies are only available to those travelling on a Wild Frontiers holiday.

For more information and to purchase your policy online please visit the Insurance section of our website.

The cover is underwritten by the International Insurance Company of Hannover Limited (IICH), who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA). Wild Frontiers Limited is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Travel & General Insurance Company plc, details of which can be found at the FSA's website [www.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.fsa.gov.uk).

If you do decide to purchase alternative insurance, then you must ensure that it covers you for every aspect of this trip.

**Visas:** Visas are necessary for many of the destinations we travel to and while we aim to provide you with the most up-to-date information, requirements frequently change and as such we advise that you check with the relevant embassies or contact our recommended visa agency, Travcour (020 7223 5295) [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) for the latest advice.

For this tour, UK passport holders require a visa for Oman which can be easily obtained on arrival.

Non-UK passport holders should contact the relevant embassies for individual requirements.

Further details will be sent out to you on booking, however ensuring that correct

and valid visas are obtained remains the sole responsibility of the client.

**Responsible Travel:** Responsible travel and sustainable tourism are fundamental ideas that Wild Frontiers has been committed to since our birth. It is our strong belief that these words should not be simply 'tagged on' to dossiers and websites but should be at the very core of each trip, and our adventures are therefore designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. We believe that a successful trip not only delivers a unique and unsurpassable journey for our clients, but that it also benefits the peoples whose lands we are privileged to visit.

**The Wild Frontiers Foundation:** In order to facilitate an enduring support structure for the communities we visit, and to show a commitment to these values, Wild Frontiers has set up a charitable foundation through which we can channel funds to both existing NGOs and our own development projects. In addition to organising ethically sensitive tours, having our own charitable foundation allows us to raise money - through the cost of our tours, charity trips and fund raising events - which can then be used to fund various projects in education, sanitation, reforestations and a number of other important issues facing developing communities. Wherever possible we are happy for our clients to visit these projects to see for themselves where and how this money is being spent. For a full list of partner NGOs please visit our website. Should you wish to donate to the foundation please contact the office for details.

**The Environment:** Trying to do our bit for the environment, in 2005 we were among the first UK-based travel companies to automatically offset every client's international flight (if booked with us) with a payment to Carbon Clear to help promote sustainable energy.

**Climate:** With its hot, dry winters, Oman makes for a perfect destination at this time of year. Expect daytime temperatures in the late 20s and but night-time temperatures in the desert can be a little fresh although nowhere near freezing.

**Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO):** The FCO travel advice highlights potential hazards people might experience when travelling abroad. Given the nature of destinations offered by Wild Frontiers it is inevitable that from time to time some itineraries contravene this advice. Whilst WF takes the safety and security of its clients extremely seriously, we will not necessarily cancel a trip because of the FCO advice. It is recommended therefore that clients check this advice before booking and contact us if they have any queries or concerns. Please see our website for further information.

**Further information:**

When you make a confirmed booking with Wild Frontiers we will send you our confirmation pack with complete pre-departure information giving you details on visas, health and vaccinations, packing lists, suggested reading on the region, insurance, photography and other useful tips to make your trip more enjoyable.

## OMAN - THE FACTS



**Muscat:** the capital city of Oman lies sparkling white, topped with golden minarets in the middle of a maze of brown pleated mountains reaching down to the Arabian Sea. Described as "Arabia's jewel", this city is a blend of the old and the new. The city has steadfastly retained its old-world character and Old

Muscat has a quaint charm about it with many forts, castles, mosques and towers dotting the landscape. Greater Muscat boasts high-rise business properties (but not too high), world-class highways, upscale suburbs rooted in traditional Islamic architecture, elegant mosques, large green parks, archaeological sites, museums and world-class hotels.



**Oman:** The oldest independent state in the Arab world, Oman is one of the more traditional countries in the Gulf region and was, until the 1970s, one of the most isolated. Occupying the south-east corner of the Arabian Peninsula, it has a strategically important position at the mouth of the Gulf. At one time Oman had its own empire, which at its peak in the 19th century stretched down the east African coast and vied with Portugal and Britain for influence in the Gulf and Indian Ocean. Oman has a deep and rich culture that extends back for thousands of years, embracing such popular legends as the stories of Sinbad the sailor (he is believed to hail from Sohar).



Oman is also the source of frankincense that figures so prominently in the Nativity story of the Christian Bible. By the mid 1800s Oman was a thriving commercial empire due in large part to the efforts of Sayyid Said bin Sultan (a.k.a. Said the Great) who ruled from 1803-1856, the longest lived of the Al Busaidis. Said spent most of his time ruling his empire from Zanzibar, which he made his home & capital. But after his death in 1856 came an economic downturn that led to

stagnation and despair and did not end until 1970. It was then that Said bin Taimur turned over the leadership to his son Qaboos, who set about the gargantuan task of revitalising his country. Prior to 1970, there were no schools, newspapers, radio stations and only 10km of paved roads in the country.



#### How to book:

In order to confirm your booking we need to have a completed signed booking form for each client together with a £400 deposit per person. You can either return your booking form to us by post or by booking online at [www.wildfrontiers.co.uk](http://www.wildfrontiers.co.uk)

You can contact the office by email to [info@wildfrontiers.co.uk](mailto:info@wildfrontiers.co.uk) or we are very happy to take your call on 020 7736 3968.

Wild Frontiers is a fully licensed and bonded tour operator and our ATOL number is 5975. You can book your holiday with Wild Frontiers in complete confidence that all monies you pay to us for your tour are fully protected.

We are also bonded with the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). AITO members comply with the highest standards of consumer protection. Every AITO holiday is backed not only by AITO's Quality Charter but also by full financial protection.

We do recommend that you take out adequate travel insurance at the time of booking in the event that you are no longer able to travel as all deposits are non-refundable - full booking conditions can be found on the booking form and online at our website.