

# EXPLORE!

NEW

## Arabian Sands Eclipse

8 days

Oman - Trip code OME



## Arabian Sands Eclipse

Witness a spectacular annular eclipse in the Wahiba Sands on this adventure through the diverse landscapes of this fascinating country. Discover the contrasts of modern day and ancient Omani life by visiting colourful souks, observing traditional dhow shipbuilding techniques and exploring the contemporary Grand Mosque in Muscat. Stay on the highest mountain in the country and peer down echoing fissures at Oman's grand canyon. Sleep out under a bed of stars in a true wilderness camp in the desert and swim in turquoise waters at Wadi Arbayeen.

## Trip highlights

- ★ **Annular eclipse** - Watch the solar eclipse from the desert at Wahabi Sands
- ★ **Muscat** - See the impressive Forts, Royal Palace and Corniche of the capital
- ★ **Sur** - Learn about Dhow building at the Ayega village and boat yard
- ★ **Wahiba Sands** - 4WD exploration and camp among spectacular sand dunes
- ★ **Dhow** - Take a trip on a traditional wooden boat, enjoy great snorkelling opportunities

### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

#### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

**TRIP PACE:****Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

**GROUP SIZE:****10 - 15**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

# Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

## DAY 1 - Explore Muscat

Arrive in Muscat and join the tour at the hotel. Muscat is an old walled town, surrounded by a horseshoe ring of mountains that naturally restricts its growth. This afternoon we will take an orientation tour of the city. Muscat displays intermingling ancient cultural heritage and modern style; we will see houses, gates, old markets, small shops and winding roads evocative of authentic history, side by side with busy markets, shops, buildings and streets stamped with modern architecture. On our tour we will visit Bait Baranda Museum, which provides a good introduction to Oman's history and current political and cultural climate. We will also have the chance to take a stroll along the waterfront of Mutrah, Muscat's oldest quarter and onto the souk.



**Accommodation: Al Falaj Hotel** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Visit the Grand Mosque and drive along the coast to Wadi Arbayeen by 4WD

This morning we visit the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque; the largest mosque in the country with space for up to 20,000 worshippers. This sandstone-made building features a huge Iranian made prayer map which took 600 women 4 years to make! After exploring the mosque we will head out of Muscat in our 4WD and follow the coastal road till we reach Qurayat, a fishing town known for its basket making. We will have a walk around the town, and we will see how the fishermen live their lives. From here we proceed towards the coast and visit the spectacular Bimah sinkhole, a huge limestone crater with blue green water at the bottom. We then start on an adventurous route cutting through the mountains to Wadi Arbayeen, our campsite set amongst date palms by a deep pool of water. This is a wild campsite. There are no showers or toilet blocks. These basic facilities ensure a true wilderness experience. Camping equipment is provided locally including a mattress, bed sheet, sleeping bag and pillow. Your tents will be erected by our camp crew on arrival to camp and our camp chef will provide all meals.



## Accommodation: Basic Desert Camp (or similar)



Simple Camping



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast and Dinner

## DAY 3 - Explore a dhow shipbuilding yard and travel to Ras Al Hadd on the Arabian Sea

After breakfast in the camp we continue along the rugged coastline we head for Al Hadd, pausing en-route to visit the port of Sur. Once a major trading port with East Africa, Sur represents the seafaring origins of Oman. We will visit the dhow shipbuilding yard where traditional dhow boats, used throughout the 19th century, are still built today. We have quite a lot of driving today so will have a packed lunch (prepared by our chef!) and our leader will find a scenic spot to stop and eat on the journey. Leaving Sur we make our way to Ras Al Hadd and check in to our hotel. After dinner we take a short drive down to Ras Al Hadd beach which features a turtle conservation reserve. A local naturalist will lead us down to the beach where we will hopefully see turtles nesting. We are not in the high season for turtle sighting but there is generally nesting here year round.



## Accommodation: Holiday Hotel - Ras Al Hadd (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

## DAY 4 - Cross the desert to Wahiba Sands

We leave the coast behind and drive deep into the heart of the shifting sands of Wahiba. Laid out like a great ocean of sand the endless dunes are generally rusty red at the base and honey coloured on the top - an alluring landscape of changing contours and colours. The sands are home to the Bedu, nomadic tribesmen who roam the land with goats and camels, or live in small fishing villages. An exhilarating drive across the dunes brings us to the Wahiba Sands, our campsite for the night. We aim to arrive in to our wild camp mid-afternoon and there will be time to explore the huge dunes before we settle down to a dinner. This is a wild campsite in the desert. There are no showers or toilet blocks. These basic facilities ensure a true wilderness experience. Camping equipment is provided locally including a mattress, bed sheet, sleeping bag and pillow. Your tents will be erected by our camp crew on arrival to camp and our camp chef will provide all meals.



## Accommodation: Basic Desert Camp (or similar)



Simple Camping



Single room available




Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

## DAY 5 - Witness the annular solar eclipse in the desert

An annular eclipse occurs this morning, 26th December 2019; this phenomenon occurs when the moon and sun are directly in line, but it appears that the size of moon is smaller than that of the Sun, this then creates a bright ring, surrounding the dark circle of the

moon. Weather conditions cannot be guaranteed, but the chance of clear, mostly clear or partly cloudy skies is around 82%. Eclipse glasses will be provided to allow you to view this natural wonder safely and we will be accompanied by an expert astronomer to provide more information and answer any questions you may have. After we have witnessed the eclipse we will break camp and rejoin the tarmac road travelling north to Nizwa. This afternoon we will have time to visit the 17th century Nizwa fort, which is worth visiting to climb the 40 metre tower and look out over the forest of date palms that circle the city.

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 Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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## DAY 6 - Discover Nizwa's famous Friday market and visit Bahla Fort

We are up early this morning to explore Nizwa's Friday market, this lively throng of sellers, buyers and onlookers gather weekly to barter, gossip and inspect animals, mainly cows and goats. The animals are walked around a circular stall as their price is haggled over; this generally involves some good natured shouting and a rather strong smell of animal excrement. We will wonder through the rest of souk, which sells traditionally made handicrafts, a huge fruit and veg section and even an antique gun area. We get back into our 4WD and head to Bahla to see its imposing fort, one of the oldest in Oman and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The fort is made from mud bricks with rounded turrets and has battlements and walls that stretch for 7km around the town. Aside from the impressive fort, Bahla is also known for its pottery and we will make a quick stop at a potter to learn about their craft and a chance to buy some gifts. Our destination is Jebel Shams, the highest mountain in Oman with a summit of just over 3000 metres, though we will be sleeping below that altitude. After check-in, we will take a short walk to the viewpoint of Wadi Ghul, also known as the Grand Canyon of Arabia. At some parts of the ridge there are vertigo-inducing views of 1000 metre deep fissures; we will be here late afternoon as the last light of the day disappears down the canyon.



**Accommodation: Al Diyar Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast and Dinner

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## DAY 7 - Explore Al Hamra village, meet beekeepers head back to Muscat

We begin with a visit to Misfat Al Abriyin. The village has verdant agricultural terraces, old houses built on top of solid rocks and surrounded by a forest of date palms. Further on we visit Al Hamra village famous for its date plantation and Omani honey. Beekeeping has been practiced since ancient times in Oman. The country's varied landscape of deserts, rivers, hills and grassy plains ensure that a diverse range of palms, fruit trees and sugarcane can flourish, all of which are favoured by the honey bee. We continue our adventure by leaving the tarmac and crossing the Western Hajar Mountains via Wadi Bani Awf, a deep canyon with towering limestone cliffs. As we drive through we will see small plantations of dates, lemons and mangos which provide a livelihood for the brave residents of this desolate area. From deserted isolation we re-enter civilisation and make our way into the Muscat. We will check into our hotel late afternoon for our last night of the trip.



**Accommodation: Al Falaj Hotel** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 8 - Trip ends in Muscat

Trip ends this morning after breakfast.

 Meals Provided: Breakfast

## Why book this trip

Imagine spending the night in the desert, sleeping under the most incredible starlit sky and then waking up and seeing a solar eclipse whilst having your morning coffee. That is why Oman has to be the best place to view the annular eclipse in 2019.

## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 7  
Lunch: 3  
Dinner: 5



### Transport

4WD



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Astronomer  
Camp Crew  
Driver(s)



### Accommodation

2 nights simple camping  
2 nights premium hotel  
2 nights standard hotel

## Trip information

### Country information

### Oman Holidays & Tours

#### Climate

The annual rainfall in most parts of Oman does not usually exceed 125mm, although in the north (the Jebel Akhdar mountain area), it can exceed 20-25mm per month in the December to February period. The coastal areas have a hot and humid season from May to September (up to 38 degrees C), although temperatures remain high throughout the year. Inland the humidity is lower, and nights are cooler in winter when there can be frost in the desert. There is perpetual sunshine throughout the year.

#### Time difference to GMT

+4

#### Plugs

3 Pin Round

#### Religion

Badi Islam, Sunni Islam, Shiite Islam, Hindu.

## Language

Arabic, English, Farsi, Baluchi, Urdu.

# Budgeting and packing

## Clothing

You will need lightweight clothing for sunny days, with a sunhat and neck protection. You will also need some warmer clothing for the evenings. Nights camping in the desert and along the Arabian coast can be cold in winter, so please bring a warm jacket or fleece. Bare shoulders and legs cause offence outside main cities and hotels. Therefore women should cover up when visiting villages. At our wild camping spots shorts are fine. Women are advised not to wear shorts or dresses that are too revealing as this can attract unwelcome attention in towns - loose fitting trousers are ideal. Women should also cover their head and shoulders when entering a mosque and men should wear long trousers.

## Footwear

Comfortable walking shoes or boots, trainers (that you don't mind getting wet) and sandals.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

One main piece of luggage and a daypack. Dust-proof bags will be needed for luggage whilst travelling through the desert.

## Equipment

A personal water bottle is useful and a small torch essential. A sleeping bag is provided, but if you would like to bring your own then we recommend a 2/3 season.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

### Local crew

You should allow approximately £25 for gratuities for local staff.

## Country Information

### Oman Holidays & Tours

#### Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

##### Lunch price

£4.5

##### Dinner price

£10

##### Beer price

£3.5

##### Water price

£1

#### Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Omani Riyal.

#### **Recommended Currency For Exchange**

Sterling and US\$ are widely accepted. It is worth taking some money in cash. You can get local currency from exchange offices at home.

#### **Where To Exchange**

Banks or 'Forex' offices in main towns/cities

#### **ATM Availability**

ATMs are widely available in major towns/cities.

#### **Credit Card Acceptance**

In hotels and some larger shops/restaurants.

#### **Travellers Cheques**

Travellers Cheques can be cashed in Oman, but banks and exchange offices do tend to charge a high exchange rate.

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

4WD

### Accommodation notes

#### **Booking a Single Room**

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

The campsites on this trip are wild camps in the desert. There are no showers or toilet blocks. These basic facilities ensure a true wilderness experience in the desert. Camping equipment is provided locally including a mattress, bed sheet, sleeping bag and pillow. Your tents will be erected by our camp crew on arrival to camp and our camp chef will provide all meals.

## Essential information

### FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

#### **Under 18 immigration guidance**

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

### Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

### Visa Information

Oman: Citizens from the UK, New Zealand, Australia, US and Canada require a visa, this can be arranged on arrival for the current cost of 20 Omani Rials per person, approximately 43GBP, 55USD for a 1 month visa. This can be paid in British Sterling or US

Dollars. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

## Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

## Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

### Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

### Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

## Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

### Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

### Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## Oman Holidays & Tours

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Malaria, Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against Malaria. Please note that all travellers aged over 9 months old will be required to supply a yellow fever certificate if you have travelled from or have transited via a country with a risk of yellow fever transmission. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.



