

GLOBAL

DESTINATIONS

A Guide to the world of Hospitality and Tourism

◆ Oman ◆ ITB Berlin ◆ Express Inn ◆ Gadgets



Readers: Our Most Precious Asset



Magnificent Oman

Oman is worth a visit thanks to its natural beauty says
Chandragupta Amritkar

Having traversed the globe and visited 40 plus countries this was my first visit to Oman. It was again thanks to my good friend Hamed M. Al-Harthy, Country Manager – India, Oman Air that this was possible. I had been invited to cover ITB, Berlin and when I mentioned this to Hamed M. Al-Harthy, he saw an opportunity for me to visit his country and promote it through my publication to my elite readers. He decided to fly me down to Germany with a stopover in Muscat. Muscat was so impressive that now we are doing a cover story on Oman. His foresight has to be appreciated.

I thought who would be the best tour operator for Oman and many said it has to be Tour Oman who are aggressively promoting themselves to the Indian market. Having met Sunil Prabhakar, CEO, Travel City and Travel Point LLC as well as Manoj Dass, Head - Tour Oman, a division of Travel Point LLC, I sent an email to them and they were kind enough to quickly reply that they will take care of the local hospitality as well as visa.

All set to go I took the morning Oman Air flight which has a fairly good timing of 6.40am (unlike most other airlines where you invariably miss out on a good night's sleep). The flight was on time and I picked up the visa from the visa counter and cleared the immigration quickly. Coming out of the airport I spotted the Tour Oman placard. We proceeded to Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa. It took us 45 minutes from the airport to reach the property. Had heard a lot about the property from both Hamed M. Al-Harthy as well as Sunil Prabhakar and I was not disappointed.

The route from airport was so picturesque – the postcard images of buildings, the good roads, the greenery etc.

Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa

A fully integrated destination resort

It's difficult to visualise the size of the property (spread over 124 acres) till you start moving around the property in a buggy. It's truly an amazing property giving some of the most scenic views. Located just 20 minutes from downtown Muscat the

Resort is a fully integrated destination resort ideal for both families and business travelers, MICE and weddings.

After a quick check-in I was guided to my room located in the Al Husn property. I was informed that Al Husn is one of Oman's most luxurious hotels. My room was spacious and well located - facing the sea. Complimentary selected beverages from the in room mini bar were also included. On request an iPod is also provided.

After relaxing for a while I explored the area in close vicinity to my room. I found a nice cozy library with books from almost 10 languages. I picked up one for reading. There's also a nice business center in the same room with computers and a printer - open 24 hours.

I was scheduled to have lunch with Eihab Attia, Communications Manager, Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa. I could not meet Lori-Jean Collins, Director of Sales & Marketing, Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa as she was out of the country. (I had the fortune of meeting her at ITB Berlin a few days later).

Over lunch Eihab Attia explained that the property comprises of three hotels - the exclusive Al Husn (The Castle), Al Bandar (The Town) and the family-oriented Al Waha (The Oasis) – having a total of 640 rooms and suites all overlooking the Sea of Oman and providing guests with 600 metres of pristine coastline.

After lunch Eihab Attia took me for a tour of the property starting with the Al Husn hotel.

The hotel's design reflects a fusion of Moorish architecture.





All 180 deluxe guestrooms and suites face the sea. “Guests staying at Al Husn can enjoy the facilities of the entire three hotel resort but the services and facilities within Al Husn are exclusive to Al Husn guests - butler service, private beach and beach bar, infinity pool, library and hospitality lounge. Access to the central courtyard which has just water and palm trees facing the ocean is also exclusive to Al Husn guests,” said Eihab Attia.

From here we walked down to the Al Bandar hotel whose architecture is inspired by old Muscat, featuring buildings of varying heights and a variety of ornate balconies. The deluxe property provides 198 guestrooms with views of the garden, sea or swimming pool.

“Al Bandar is the resort’s focal point. While the three hotels share 21 food and beverage outlets Al Bandar has 8 out of 21 F&B outlets. Our restaurants serve cuisines from numerous countries including Indian, Asian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Italian, Middle Eastern and even South American. On the MICE front Al Bandar has 11 meeting rooms including the spectacular Barr Al Jissah Ballroom, which spans 1,008 square metres and provides banquet-style seating for up to 850 people,” said Eihab Attia.

With such a huge ballroom it can be an ideal destination for Indian corporate to hold their MICE events and also Indian weddings. There are also seven additional meeting rooms.

Al Bandar is also the hub for swimming enthusiasts of all ages - a pool spanning 1,400 square metres, a Jacuzzi, children’s pool, as well as access to the Lazy River. The 500-metre Lazy River enables guests an unusual method to travel between Al Bandar and Al Waha by floating between the two hotels’ main swimming pools on a controlled water current.

From here we proceeded to Al Waha which comprises 262 guestrooms. Its ideal for families with children as it features Cool Zone, one of the three children’s clubs within the resort offering a wide range of supervised indoor and outdoor activities for children up to the age of 10. There’s also a toddler’s pool with a rubber cushioned floor.

I also had the pleasure of meeting and spending some quality time with Mark Kirk, the dynamic General Manager of the hotel. What amazed me was his knowledge on the industry and his dedication to the group – he has been over 12 years with Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts at various locations.

Due to lack of time and a very busy schedule I could not enjoy the resort facilities like Scuba Diving & Snorkelling (which I was

able to do on my visit to Maldives a fortnight later), Marina & Sailing – a private resort marina, with berthing for up to 80 boats and yachts. The resort also has a SPA – CHI, a secluded spa – one of the largest spa villas in Muscat. One can experience the unique CHI Water Oasis, featuring a vitality hydro pool, an herbal steam room, tundra and tropical showers, an ice fountain and a relaxation area. A smiling Eihab Attia said, “This gives you a reason to come again and for us an opportunity to host you again.”

Tour Oman Office

Tour Oman had organized a chauffeur driven vehicle that would remain with me during my stay. I paid a visit to their Muscat office. It was a pleasure to meet Manoj Dass again. He highlighted some specific points on the tour itinerary. Then we went upstairs to meet Sunil Prabhakar. After greeting the first statement that he made was, “It’s not fair. Just 3 days in Oman. You will not justice. You need at least a week to get a glimpse of our country.”

I spent an hour with them knowing more about the group and their plans for the Indian market (see the exclusive Interview on page 12).

Muscat

Muscat often referred to as the "walled city", has a lot to attract tourists. To get a glimpse of the city Tour Oman organized a hop-on, hop-off sightseeing tour of Muscat with the Big Bus Tour. My chauffeur drove me to the main starting point of the Big Bus -





Set against the backdrop of the majestic Hajjar mountains and overlooking the resplendent Sea of Oman, Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa is an oasis of luxury hospitality. The resort which is spread over 124 acres is home to three luxury hotels - the magnificent Al Husn (The Castle), the stunning Al Bandar (The Town) and the family-oriented Al Waha (The Oasis).

A destination by itself, the luxurious resort boasts of facilities and amenities to suit both leisure as well as business travellers. Swimming pools, children's clubs, the brand's signature spa - CHI, a variety of 21 dining outlets and a 500-metre Lazy River makes Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa an ideal location for families and leisure travellers to unwind, relax and rejuvenate.

The resort's three hotels are well-equipped to cater to the business traveller while making it one of the choicest MICE venues in Oman. A variety of meeting rooms, a ballroom that can seat up to 700 guests, and state-of-the-art audiovisual and lighting facilities are some of the highlights of the resort.

Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa has the largest number of food and beverage outlets with cuisines that include Lebanese, Moroccan, Italian, Middle Eastern, Indian, Asian and South American.

The resort is a favoured wedding venue not only among the residents of Oman but also visitors who fly to the Sultanate to tie the knot in the picturesque destination. A dedicated team of event planners ensure that just about every wish comes true to make weddings memorable.

- Anne Kurian



“ A destination by itself, the luxurious resort boasts of facilities and amenities to suit both leisure as well as business travellers. ”



Mutrah Suq. The Day Tour can be boarded at any one of the tours 10 stops across the city. The ticket is valid for 24 hours during operating hours. The route takes you to the major landmarks and historic sights across the city as you listen (ear phones are provided) to a recorded commentary (available in six languages) providing information on the landmark as well as explaining the history and culture of the city. Included in the Big Bus ticket is a free shuttle service to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

On finishing the tour I decided to stroll around the Mutrah Suq (souk) - one of the oldest markets in the Arab World. There are numerous alleyways with shops offering a variety of traditional and modern goods - Asian spices, gold and silver, precious gems, antiques, souvenirs etc. It has also many cafes or restaurants.

The Corniche Area with its promenade, markets, cafes and restaurants, is one of the highlights of the city. Stretching three kilometers with gardens and fountains adorning the area, it overlooks the port. The renovated Corniche area is a popular place for a walk and also for its eating joints.

On the southern end of the Corniche you can view the Mutrah Fort raised high upon the rocks. The fort was built by the Portuguese during their occupation in the 1580's. If you are adventurous then scale the fort to enjoy some incredible views.

Qasr Al Alam Royal Palace is the office of Sultan Qaboos, the ruler of Oman. Though visitors are not allowed to visit the palace, they can take photographs at the entrance of the palace.

Oman's parliament building, locally known as Majlis Oman is a new parliament building which includes four major components; the council of Oman, the state council, the consultation council and common facilities. The iconic centrepiece of the parliament building is the 64 metre high clock tower. Boasting four 4.8 metre clocks, it is the highest clock tower in Oman.

Oman is full of beaches and Muscat is no exception. The Qurum beach located adjacent to the Mangrove Lagoon is an open public beach and a popular destination for locals as well as tourists for a swim or to relax under the palm trees.

Another must stop is the Royal Opera House Muscat a premier venue for musical arts and culture. It reflects contemporary Omani architecture, and has a capacity to accommodate maximum of 1,100 people. The opera house complex consists of a concert theatre, auditorium, formal landscaped gardens, cultural market with retail, luxury restaurants and an art centre for musical, theatrical and operatic productions. Time and availability of tickets permitting do try to watch a concert.

Do keep a couple of hours for the Sultan Qaboos Grand

Mosque. This is the third largest mosque in the world (accommodating up to 20,000 worshippers) and one of the few open to non-Muslim visitors – Visit from 8am to 11am - Saturday to Thursday.

The Mosque is a work of art and its interior decor is exquisite. It consists of a main prayer hall, ladies prayer hall, covered passageways, a meeting hall and a huge library (I liked the library which has numerous book on various topics and also over 20 computers to use for your research – all free).

The walls of the main hall are covered with white and dark grey marble, decorated with murals of leafy patterns and geometrical designs. The dome is made up of spherical triangles inside a complex of sides and marble columns, crossed with pointed arches and embellished with porcelain panels. Timber panels stretch in a custom that reflects the architectural development of Omani ceilings. Must sees in the mosque include the Swarovski crystal chandelier, the second largest hand made persian carpet in the world and the marble panelling.

Like in Thailand there are numerous Indian run tailors who stitch suits from excellent fabrics at a reasonable price.

Wadi Shab

After touring Muscat and a good nights rest in Shangri-La we proceeded to Wadi Shab. The driver informed me that Wadi Shab is one of the most spectacular of the easily accessible wadis in



Oman. Located about 100 km southeast of Muscat its accessed from the main coastal road to Sur at the village of Tiwi.

On the way our first halt was at Bimmah Sink hole (a sinkhole is a natural depression or hole in the Earth's surface which may have various causes) situated at the Hawiyat Najm Park. The water in the pool is in a unique shade of vibrant turquoise, the pool roughly 550 meters from the sea, is 40 meters wide and about 20 meters under the surface. Quite a few people were swimming.

Then we proceeded to Quriyat, Wadi Tiwi, and Fins beach. The place was a bit crowded and one has to take a small boat or wade through the water (which a lot of Europeans were doing). The wadi gives visitors views of aquamarine pools, waterfalls and terraced plantations. There's a partially submerged cave. The hiking can be rocky and even slippery so a good pair of shoes is a must. Not having the right kind of shoes and not being very adventurous I just enjoyed the beauty of the place and the waterfalls without trekking.

Wadi Shab Resort

For lunch we proceeded to the Wadi Shab Resort. The GM there is an Indian and you get a lot of Indian dishes to relish making it an ideal place to stay over for Indians. The resort is truly beautiful and offers the serenity of mountains and the surf of the sea. The resort has 34 guest rooms and 03 luxury suites and all



rooms offer a view of the sea from all its rooms. All rooms have flat screen LED television and guests are offered free Wi Fi access in rooms and public area. The resort offers guests boating amenities

It is ideally located to visit Wadi Shab just 3 kms from the resort. The resort is built on the hill overlooking the blue sea near Tiwi. Sur town is approximately 47 kms from resort.

The Tomb of Bibi Mariam, in the Ancient City of Qalhat is situated approximately 4 kms from Wadi Shab Resort. Qalhat remains on UNESCO's tentative list of cultural heritage sites and was Oman's first capital.

Sur

After a good Indian dinner and a nights rest we proceeded to Sur, renowned as the Dhow City, approximately 70 kms from the resort. It is a placid sea coast town with striking traditional dwellings. The streets revealed many fine old houses with carved doors and arabesque windows.

Its one of the famous cities in the Persian Gulf in building wooden ships. Even though the city is a major dhow-building town – the orders have steadily declined.

Wadi Bani Khalid

Wadi Bani Khalid is a wadi whose stream maintains a constant

flow of water throughout the year. Large pools of water and boulders are scattered along the course of the wadi. As you enter the wadi there are two large pools of clear emerald water, a simple café and plenty of palm trees. Follow the sign 'cave' located after a km of rock climbing and relish some beautiful human beings swimming in the crystal clear water and narrow canyons. Reaching this cave takes a lot of effort and visitors should be prepared for the adventure. As a geographical area, Wadi Bani Khalid covers a large swathe of low land and mountains.

Caves form some of the interesting features of this wadi. Before going deep into the wadi do use the clean toilets at the beginning of the Wadi.

From here we proceed to Muscat and reached by 6 pm. Since my flight was at 2am I stopped by at Muscat Dunes Hotel where Ajai Punj is the General Manager. Ajai Punj asked me to release the driver as he said at 11pm he will personally drop me at the airport.

Taking me on a tour of the property its quite noticeable that the hotel is quite new with all modern furniture. The rooms are big and clean though I felt the bathrooms were small compared to the room size. The location is convenient near the expressway and



just 15 minutes from the airport. Being in a new development area it's not easy to find the hotel (my driver had to call a couple of times to get exact directions). The pool on the roof gives good views of the neighborhood.

Thanks to an Indian menu and a pocket friendly hotel it would be a good option for Indians. They also have extensive conference facilities for board meetings, seminars and small conventions.

We had a good Indian dinner and then at 11pm Ajai Punj accompanied me to the airport.

NOW LINKING NIGER TO OUR DESTINATIONS

FLY TO NIAMEY FOUR TIMES WEEKLY

STARTING NOVEMBER 2013



Toll free number 000 800 100 7947



A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

“India is a very big market for Oman”



Travel City LLC and Travel Point LLC have emerged as one of the most reputed and successful travel service providers in the Sultanate of Oman. This group underwent a management change in 2008 surging it to the top of the market. From a mere 9 member workforce, they now have a team of about 200 spread across the country.

Travel Point LLC office represents all other travel solutions such as international product franchises, high quality leisure & hospitality products, Medicare tourism, pilgrimages, travel management partners, car hire, logistics and cargo and many more.

Tour Oman is the Inbound Tours division attracting global visitors to experience in Oman.

Spearheading the operations is **Sunil Prabhakar, Chief Executive Officer** of the Travel Group who has more than 29 years of experience in Oman. In 2008 when he became Group General Manager he enhanced the business network from only 2 branches, to 42 fully operational branches spread across Oman. **Manoj Dass who is head of Tour Oman** has been quite successful in getting FIT Travel, Leisure Groups, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) and even Bollywood. Had the pleasure of meeting both of them had their Muscat office and took the opportunity to interview them. Excerpts

What makes Oman such an attractive destination?

Sunil Prabhakar (SP): Oman has so much of potential - 1700 kms of pristine coastline, over 500 forts and towers across Oman, the dry desert and the huge desert dunes, the wadis and mountains of over 9000 feet. Oman's beaches are major breeding locations for various species of sea turtle. It's a must for a visitor. Also as you will notice during your travels Omanis are most humble, very friendly and helpful to tourists. Compared to most other countries Oman is relatively a safe country and serious crime is rare.

How big is your group and reason behind its success?

SP: We have grown substantially over the years largely due to

owners blessings and a free hand given by them. Our USP is that we do things uniquely different. We have major plans to expand across GCC and India.

Manoj Dass (MD): We have currently 42 outlets spread across the country making us the most widely spread travel company in Oman. This naturally helps our inbound tourists.

MICE is a major revenue earner today. Your views?

SP: Yes that's true. We have successfully handled events ranging from just 30 pax to 1000 pax. Infact we had a group from India who had come to celebrate a birthday. There were 100 guests flown from all over India and Dubai. Thanks to Oman air network this was feasible.

We had kept a staff 24 * 7 exclusively for the group. To all the guests we sent the SIM in advance so that they can share the number with their friends and near ones. It was a grand success.

Apart from that I think Oman can be a wedding destination.

What potential do you see in India?

SP: India is a very big market for Oman. Over the last three years hotel rooms have grown and are trying to attract Indian tourists. A lot of tour operators have promoted Oman as a stop-over destination. We are now trying to promote Oman as an independent destination.

How do you plan to promote Oman in India?

MD: We are participating in numerous exhibitions across India. We also have our own road shows. Currently we are having our own representatives in Mumbai and New Delhi. I can proudly say we are market leaders in India.

What type of markets are you looking from India?

MD: All types – FIT, Leisure, MICE, Cultural fusion, home-stays, etc.

SP: Another potential market is the Bollywood. Why go all the way to Europe or Australia when Oman can provide for most of your needs. We have some of the best shooting locations – untapped and awaiting Bollywood stars, top end luxury hotels like Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa. For Once Upon a Time in Mumbai Dobaara we did all the logistics including getting permission for shooting and script approval.

How economical can it be to shoot a movie and does the government give any incentives?

SP: Its not very expensive. To give you a fair idea to do a film song in Oman with 20 crew members including stay and air tickets would be just Rs.15 lakh. For doing a full movie with 75 crew spread across 45 days – all inclusive it would be between 3 to 3.5 crores. This I believe should fit into most budgets. On the incentive part we are still persuading the government and making them understand the full potential and the opportunity.

What would you advise Indian tourists?

SP: Plan a trip for minimum seven days. Thers a lot to see and experience in Oman.

In
Your
Journey
to a
**PERFECT
DAY**



Meetings...Appointments...Reaching....Deciding....Finalizing. A business traveller's day is full of hectic moves to achieve the Goal. Goals that require every bit of concentration and attention.

We appreciate and acknowledge your Effort and Endeavour in keeping the spirit of growth and success a constant process.

By your side, comforting and supporting, for everything you need, we stand quietly, ensuring and assuring, you achieve what you set out for.

At the end of the day, when you walk back in, with a smile that spells success, we rejoice with you. Your Perfect Day is our pride and the zest to work for the next day.

Kohinoor Continental is a proud partner to your Perfect Day.
Our Success Comes with Your Growth.



ANDHERI KURLA ROAD, ANDHERI (E), MUMBAI - 400059 (INDIA)
Tel.: 00-91-22-66919000 Toll Free: 1-800-209 3500 Fax: 00-91-22-28382434

e-mail: reservations@hotelkohinoorcontinental.com website: www.hotelkohinoorcontinental.com

Regional Sales Off:

Delhi: 00-91-11-45042511 / 9313503319 / 9313083858 e-mail: delhisales@hotelkohinoorcontinental.com

Pune: 00-91-20-25535227 / 9371072605 e-mail: punesales@hotelkohinoorcontinental.com

Bangalore: 00-91-80-41739000 / 9341001490 / 9342507387 e-mail: bangaloresales@hotelkohinoorcontinental.com