



TOUR INFORMATION FOR THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

These notes are designed to help you prepare fully for the tour. Please read carefully.

ENTERING OMAN: United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for at least six months from date of departure and a tourist visa to enter Oman. A 30-day tourist visa needs to be applied for in advance online at <https://evisa.rop.gov.om>. You will be required to submit a photograph and a copy of your passport. Note: Date of entry into Oman must be within 1 month of visa approval, so do not apply for it too early!

There are visa service agencies that can provide you with an information pack on how to obtain a visa. They will also process your application for you. However they will charge a handling and processing fee. One such company is Trailfinders Visa Service <https://www.trailfinders.com/visas> (tel: 0207 368 1504).

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport, visa and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Oman is 4 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

CURRENCY: The local currency is the Omani Riyal, divided into 1000 Baiza. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover items of a personal nature. Although major credit cards such as American Express, Visa, Mastercard and Diner's Club are accepted in large shopping areas, airports, and some hotels, smaller and more rural shops accept only cash.

LANGUAGE: The national language in Oman is Arabic but English is also quite widely spoken. We will be accompanied on our tour by an Arabic-speaking guide.

CLIMATE: It is generally warm-to-hot and dry in during the tour dates, although the south can be more humid. Temperatures range from lows of 16 - 20°C (63 - 68°F) early morning to daytime highs of 30 - 38°C (88 - 100°F). Rain is unlikely. Most days will be clear and sunny with occasional high cloud.

PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: The tour is not a strenuous one but in several places we will walk on stony desert, up rocky valleys or over soft sand and a fair amount of general walking is required in order to participate fully. There will be some early starts to take advantage of the cooler early mornings and on some days we will take breaks during the hotter part of the day. On several nights we will stay out after dark to look for owls and nightjars. Some clambering and climbing may be required to embark/disembark the boat for our pelagic.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

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It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu jab.

Although parts of Oman fall just within a malaria zone, current information indicates that there will be virtually no risk at the time we are visiting. As some of this medication cannot be given concurrently you should consult your doctor straight away to obtain advice about when to start your treatment.

Biting insects are not a big problem, though they can be a nuisance if we are birding wetland areas around dusk. Any standard insect repellent preferably with a high percentage of diethyltoluamide (DEET) should provide adequate protection.

Tap water is generally safe to drink – even the smallest villages are supplied with drinking water from water trucks – although it is often heavily chlorinated and not always pleasant to consume. Bottled drinking water is cheap, widely available and a supply will always be available in the tour vehicle. Upset stomachs might occur at some time during the tour and we suggest bringing some anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium. Packets of Dioralyte are also worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhoea. The use of suntan/sunblock lotions and creams is recommended in any warm climate – shade is not always available at some birding locations. Finally, make sure that you bring adequate supplies of all personal medication as it may be difficult or even impossible to obtain them during the tour.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMMODATION: Throughout the tour we'll be staying in reasonable to good quality hotels. All rooms will have private facilities including a bath or shower and are generally of a high standard.

ELECTRICITY: The voltage is 220/240V AC 50Hz and the sockets take the same three-pin plugs as in the UK. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

FOOD: Breakfast typically consist of bread, humus, meats, fruit, juice, coffee and tea; cooked breakfasts are available at some hotels. Curries and other Middle Eastern/Asian/Turkish foods feature prominently during lunches and dinners. Curries are *not* particularly spicy in Oman – unless requested! We will eat picnics on some days, while lunch on other days will be taken in a restaurant or coffee shop. Dinner will be eaten in our hotel or in restaurants, often in the form of a buffet or table selection, including curries, rice, fish, chicken, kebabs and omelettes. Vegetarian options, such as humous, baba ghanoush, chickpea curry or dahl are widely available.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do what we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regretfully, not be accommodated.

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DRINKS: Bottled water and/or a soft drink is provided at lunch and dinner, as is coffee or tea. Additional water is kept in a cool-box in the vehicle. Alcohol has, in the past, not been available during our tour although alcohol-free beer is served at some locations.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Mobile phone use using a British mobile phone, and mobile data use, in particular, can be very expensive in Oman – although some providers now include Oman in their ‘rest of world’ bundles, with a fixed rate for data of around £6 per day (check with you provider). We recommend tour participants turn off ‘data roaming’ before entering the country. WiFi is available in most, though not all, hotels but can be slow. For tour participants who need to keep in touch with home during the tour, we recommend purchasing an Omantel SIM on arrival at the airport at a cost of around £20.

LOCAL CUSTOMS: Omanis are extremely kind, open and generous people, and rules are not as strict as in some neighbouring countries. Even so, visitors should be aware of local customs. It is usual to use the right hand, not the left hand, when passing or receiving anything. Respect should be shown during prayer times, when we may come across individuals who have moved from working in the fields to pray on the edge of the fields. Permission should be sought before photographing any individual, male or female. Although Omani males and females often eat separately in restaurants, there are no issues for the group eating together. We may occasionally find ourselves eating in the ‘family room’.

We will pass through a small number of police checkpoints during our tour. The Royal Omani Police are friendly and welcoming, and we should not expect any difficulties. However, passports should be kept close at hand to speed up the process of passing through any checkpoints.

CLOTHING: Dress will be informal throughout the tour. Though not extreme, Oman has conservative dress traditions. Swimwear should be confined to the beach and hotel pools. Men as well as women, should try to keep shoulders and knees covered when in public, ladies’ sleeves should be to the elbow and no tight clothes, especially in markets, shops and villages. In the more remote places where we will be birding we can be more relaxed about this.

Our hotel at Salalah is only 100m from the sea and tour participants are welcome to take a dip!

FIELD CLOTHING: We recommend bringing the following items:

Long-sleeved shirts (protect from sunburn)	Light cotton trousers
Shorts: the longer the better!	Light shoes/trainers
Lightweight sweater	Sun hat (essential)
Comfortable walking shoes	Sunglasses

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: You should bring the following:

Notebook and pencil	Torch (with spare batteries)
Small rucksack or shoulder bag	Alarm clock
Insect repellent	Suncream
Universal sink plug	Picnic crockery/cutlery
Drinks bottle	Personal medication

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimming clothes.

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Note: The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leader will provide the following:

Telescope and tripod
Reference books

Small first-aid kit
Maps

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Memory cards may be difficult to obtain and will certainly be more expensive than at home so you should bring with you all that you expect to need. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dust-proof bags as a precaution. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However, if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRANSPORT: The transport will be by minibus or small coach. We will rotate the seating each day. The half-day boat trip will be on a comfortable boat with a sun shade and life-jackets will be provided.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicle or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage.

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Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Eriksen & Porter *Birds of Oman 2017*. This new guide covers all resident, breeding and wintering birds in Oman, as well as vagrants.

Mullarney, Killian et al. *Collins Bird Guide*. 2010. HarperCollins. Although primarily European-based, many of the birds we will encounter are covered in this guide.

OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803 865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

MAPS: Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
www.themapshop.co.uk

Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
www.stanfords.co.uk

OSME (Ornithological Society of the Middle East): Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing conservation organisations within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at www.osme.org

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc. and your air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions, please contact us.