

Travel



Jolly green getaway

Lush greenery, cool coastal views and only two hours away? Welcome to Salalah, Oman's worst kept secret

Talk to any Omani and you quickly learn how patriotic they are – and rightly so. Dubai day-trippers have been exploring Musandam's blue waters and Muscat's ancient streets for years now. But while the scorching summer heat tends to put people off, head down the coast to Salalah and you'll find a lush green paradise where the

temperature rarely pushes 30°C.

Every summer khareef, the southeastern monsoon season, sees the dry landscape of the Dhofar capital come alive with overflowing streams, waterfalls, greenery and ripe fruit from banana and papaya plantations. With more resorts cropping up, there has never been a better time to catch Salalah at its best. ▶



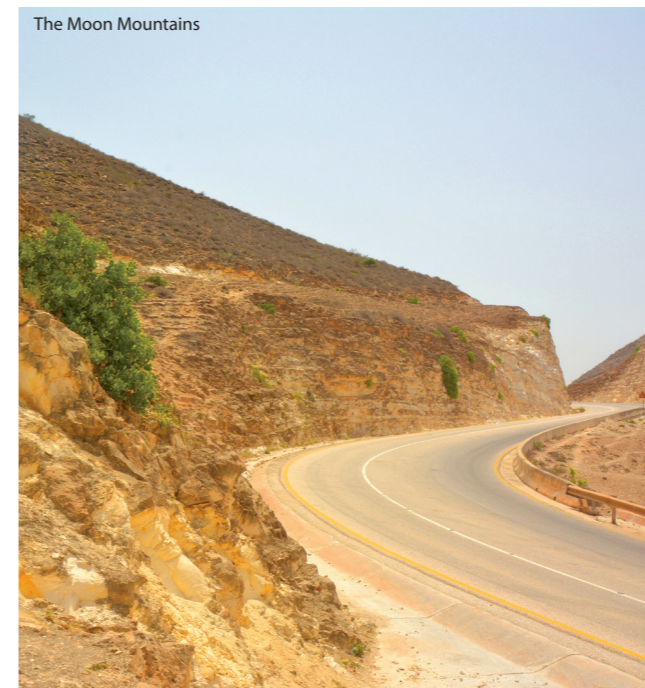
Wadi Darbat



Al Hafah Souq



Mughsail Beach



The Moon Mountains

TO DO LIST

✓ Wadi Darbat

People travel from all across the region to explore this mighty valley, cut deep into the mountain range. Getting there will require a 4x4, from where you can gawk at the waterfalls and streams carving their way along – and through – the surrounding cliffs. Large fig trees have rooted themselves precariously close to the wadi's river and herds of camels and donkeys roam freely – all soaking up the best of the khareef. You'll also find plenty of families picnicking near the cool waters.

✓ Sultan Qaboos Mosque

As any Salalah resident is likely to tell you, the city is the birthplace of Oman's Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said. That might explain why the Sultan Qaboos Mosque stands proudly in the centre of

town. It has shady archways, spotless surrounding gardens and, inside, you risk getting neck ache admiring the glitzy chandeliers and ornate detail inside the dome. Visitors have to dress conservatively and can't go inside during services.

✓ Al Hafah Souq

This small souk might not look like much, but it is the place to discover Salalah's long history with frankincense – the air is thick with it. It's in the many incense burners, the delicate oils and perfumes, and

in raw form by the bucket-load. People have harvested frankincense in Dhofar for centuries and you'll find locals sat outside their shops sorting through big sacks of the pebble-like nuggets, separating them by quality.

FRANKINCENSE

WHAT?

Dried sap of boswellia sacra tree

HOW?

Farmers harvest frankincense by stripping back the top layer of the bark – being careful not to hack into 'the bone'. Throughout history Dhofar has been famous around the world for its top-quality frankincense. Centuries ago it was considered more valuable than gold and southern Oman



was an important stop on the ancient incense trade route, connecting Europe to South Asia.

WHAT'S IT FOR?

It's used as incense – often in religious ceremonies – and as oil for perfumes and medicine. We're told that drinking frankincense-infused water helps improve memory and relieve asthma, too.

HOW TO SPOT THE BEST?

It all comes down to colour. Black frankincense is the cheapest. Green is said to have the purest smell and flavour.

sea monsters before suddenly blasting water up and out a good 10 or 20 feet in the air, soaking any unsuspecting passerby. Be warned: it's a bit of a tourist spot, with children playing 'chicken' over the grates, so try to get there early.

✓ The Moon Mountains

Rather than retracing your steps, take the scenic route through the Moon Mountains, or Jabal Al Qamar. About 2,500 metres high, these mountains are the highest in the region and named because centuries ago local tribes believed it was the closest you could get to the moon. A modern highway has been carved into the mountain range, zigzagging up steep slopes and tight turns worthy of a James Bond car chase. The surrounding hills are a geologist's dream, as they jump from dirt-brown to iron-red and bright white limestone every kilometre or so.

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GETTING THERE

Flydubai flies direct from Dubai to Salalah six times a week from Dhs1,000 return. q flydubai.com

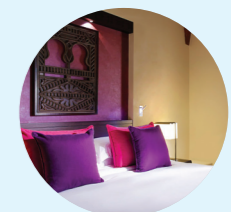
GETTING AROUND

There are plenty of taxis available, but to really see Salalah you need a car. To pack everything in try an organised day trip with the travel company Meeting Point. The guides really know their stuff and run customised tours from Salalah Rotana Resort. q meeting-point.com

STAY

Salalah Rotana Resort

This five-star resort is huge and has an impressive stretch of beach. Its suites



have their own balconies and terraces – ask for a sea view. Rates start at Dhs840 with breakfast. q rotana.com/salalahrotanaresort

Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah

A short drive from Sultan Qaboos Mosque, this is a good spot for families. There's a child-friendly pool (with a slide), a playground, beach access and tennis courts. Rooms start at Dhs770 a night.

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