

MIRNA OAZA, KI JI JE VREDNO NAMENITI SVOJ ČAS

# oman

SULTANAT OMAN JE ENA BOLJ RAZVITIH ARABSKIH DRŽAV IN MNOGOKRAT POVSEM KRIVIČNO PREZRTA DEŽELA S STRANI POPOTNIKOV.

Prvi stik z Omanom in njegovo urejenoščjo, ki ga dobiva z možem ob prihodu v skoraj milijonsko glavno mesto Muškat, priča o moderni in napredni državi. Dobrodošlico nama izrečejo široke in razsvetljene štiri- in večpasovnice, mogočne zgradbe in moderni nakupovalni centri, ki bi jim jih lahko zavidali celo Američani. Skoraj težko je verjeti, kakšen napredek je ta puščavska država dosegla v komaj štiridesetih letih, odkar je prišel na prestol sultan Qaboos bin Said. Oman je imel namreč do leta 1970 po vsej državi le dobrih 5 kilometrov asfaltiranih cest, eno bolnišnico in tri osnovne šole, ki pa so jih lahko obiskovali izključno dečki. Po le štirih desetletjih pa je stanje v državi postavljeno povsem na glavo. Odročne vasice, ki so bile nekoč dostopne le peš ali z ježo na

oslih, postajajo z novozgrajenimi cestami skoraj na dosegu rok in ljudje, ki so si nekoč jutra, dneve, večere in noči krajšali ob ognju in s kramljanjem o njihovih čredah, se dandanes pogovarjajo po najmodernejših prenosnih telefonih in se prevajažajo naokoli z dragimi džipi in poltovornjaki. Ves ta hitri razvoj pa seveda ni prav nič nenavadnega, če vemo, da za vsem tem napredkom stoji bogastvo, pridobljeno z njihovim črnim zlatom. Ta privablja tujim obiskovalcem na obraze širok nasmešek, saj je za liter bencina potrebno odštetiti zgolj 25 centov. Prav to pa je tudi razlog, da se za raziskovanje te ogromne puščavske dežele tako kot midva mnogi odločijo kar za najem avtomobila.



Lepo urejene in široke ceste z oznakami v latinci kmalu postanejo za tiste prave avanturiste nekaj bolj dolgočasne, zato sva se oba hitro strnjala, da za raziskovanje Omana najameva nekaj bolj trpežnega. Med najino obvezno opremo je brez omahovanja pristalo terensko vozilo na 4 x 4 pogon. Le-tako sva bila pri načrtovanju poti popolnoma brez omejitve in edina stvar, ki bi naju pri tem lahko ovirala, je bila najina (ne)aventuriščna narava. Kljub dejstvu, da je Oman ogromno puščavsko področje, sva bila nad pokrajino vedno znova presenečena, saj se raznolikost kaže v pestrosti narave. Tu so mogočna gorovja, ki ponujajo

prekrasne razglede, ter strmi, ozki makadamski kolovozi. Najvišja cesta v državi se nahaja na 2.000 metrih nadmorske višine in nju popelje vse do omanskega Velikega kanjona. Njegova globina znača 1.500 metrov in ponuja prekrasne možnosti za ljubitelje trekkinga, vključno z vzponom na najvišji vrh, Jebel Shams (gora sonca), s katerim boste za 48 metrov premagali magično višino treh tisočakov.

Z najvišje točke v državi pa s spustom nazaj v dolino zopet doživljava popolnoma nov svet, ki se riše z majhnimi in očarljivimi vasicami. Vožnja čez posušeno rečno strugo ter

vijuganje okoli ogromnih skalnatih blokov, ki jih je tu pustila voda, je tisto, zaradi česar je najem terenca pravi užitek. Visoke kamnite stene, ki se ozko dvigajo nad nama, zopet kažejo veličino narave. Tu so tudi Wadiji, doline, ki so lahko ob nenaslednem deževju v zimskih mesecih izredno neverne. Obdajajo jih namreč visoka gorovja, od koder voda v času dežja z veliko močjo prihrumi z njihovih vrhov in pred sabo odnaša vse, kar ji stoji na poti. Kljub suši, ki vlada v Omanu, pa se voda mnogokrat zadrži v osamljenih rečnih strugah in tolmunčkih, ki so kot nalač za prijetno osvežitev ob visokih temperaturah, značilnih za to arabsko državo.

Oman ponuja tudi ogromno obale. Pravzaprav je zaradi nje ribištvo skupaj s kmetijstvom druga najmočnejša ekonomska panoga v državi. Prisrčna bela mesteca, kjer so obale okrašene z nešteto ribiškimi čolni, nju znova in znova očarajo. Najino raziskovanje je zaradi prijaznih in radovednih domaćinov, ki nju nenehno pozdravljajo z »esalam alejkum« in kažejo dobrodošlico s širokimi in iskrenimi nasmehi, še toliko bolj zanimivo. Tudi ladjedelci, ki še vedno povsem ročno in po tradicionalnem načinu gradijo svoje tipične 200 ton težke ribiške ladje, imenovane dhow, se ne dajo motiti, medtem ko jih radovedno opazujeva in se čudiva njihovemu umetniškemu ustvarjanju. Končno pa tu najdeva tudi tisto tipično omansko hrano, kjer dobiva za predjed pita kruh in humus, sledi pa riba z rižem.

Seveda pa v Omanu ne gre prezreti niti puščave: od dolgočasno kamnite do vedno očarljive peščene, kjer se sipine dvigujejo tudi do 150 metrov nad nama. Odločila sva se, da najmanjšo med njimi, Wahiba, prečkava tudi sama, in izkušnja, ki sva jo doživljala med vožnjo, je resnično nepozabna. Kljub pustinji, ki ji ni in ni videti konca, je sem in tja vendarle mogoče opaziti kakšno čredo koz in kamel ter videti tipična bivališča beduinov, kjer ljudje še vedno živijo takšno življenje, kot so ga poznali še pred odkritjem nafte. Kljub odročnosti njihovih domov pa jih prav to dela dobrosrčne in gostoljubne ter tako zavidljivo preproste.

Čeprav je Oman še marsikomu neznanka, ga letno obišče že približno 1,2 milijona turistov. Država usmerja svoj trajnostni turistični razvoj izključno na luksuzne obiskovalce in prav to lahko naredi potovanje po Omanu pregrešno drag. A dokler je Oman še v turističnem razcvetu, obiskovalcem povsem brezplačno nudi možnost divjega kampiranja. Bi bilo lahko sploh kaj lepšega, kot deliti svoje prenočišče z milijoni zvezd na nebu, kjer ti dela družbo radovedna čreda kamel in kjer te bučanje valov počasi odnaša v miren spanec?

## OMAN –

*A tranquil oasis that is well worth your time*

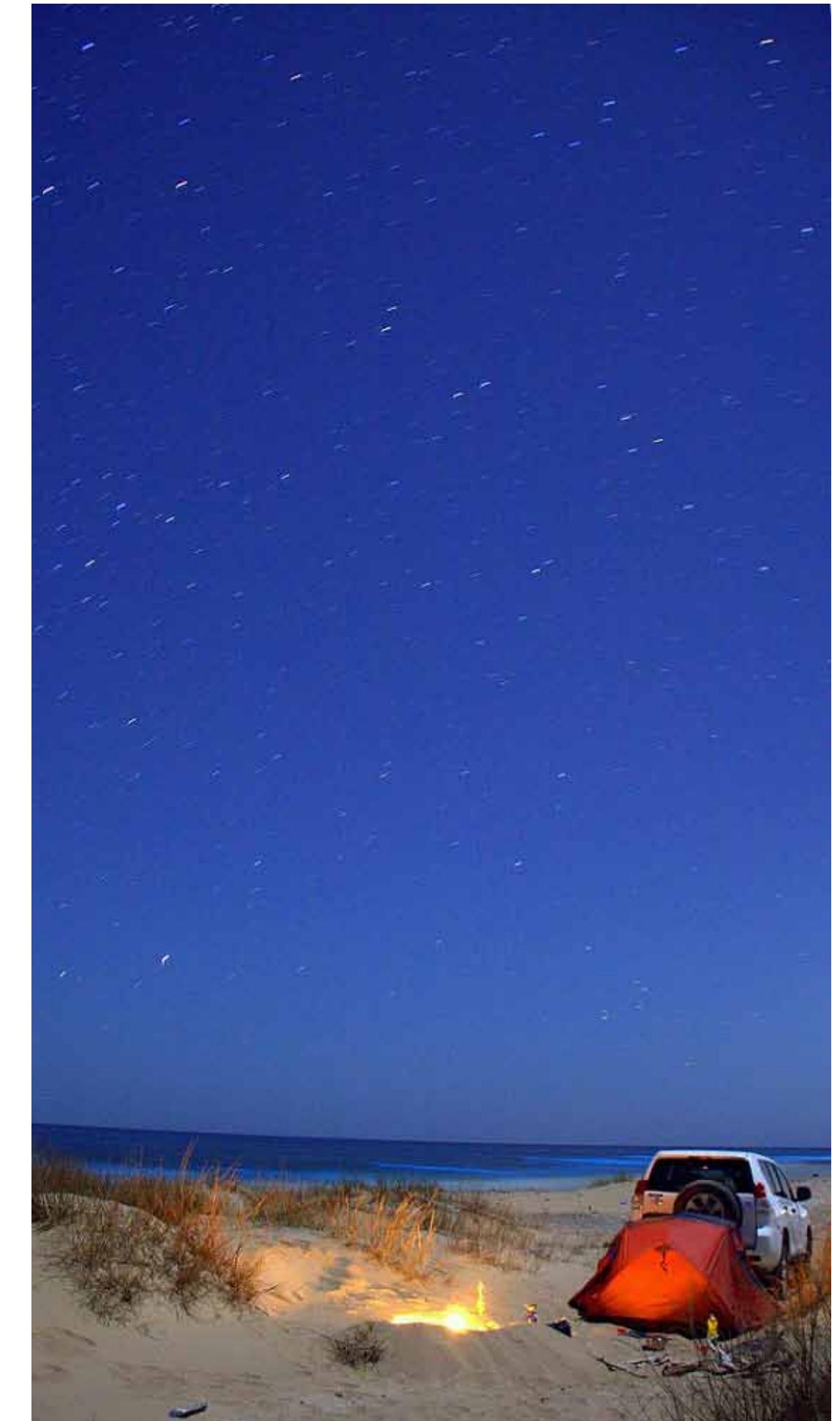
TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY: NINA KOGEJ

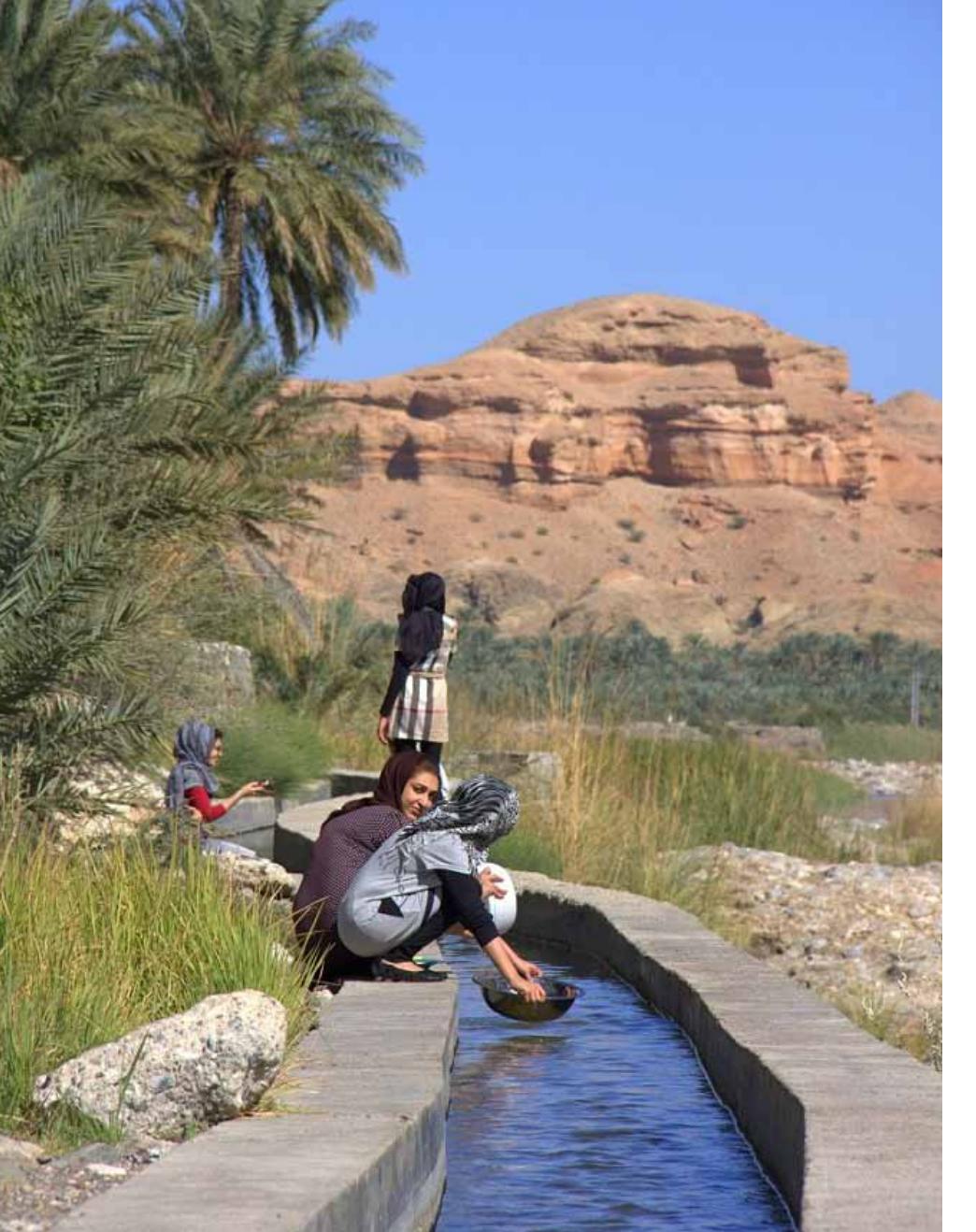
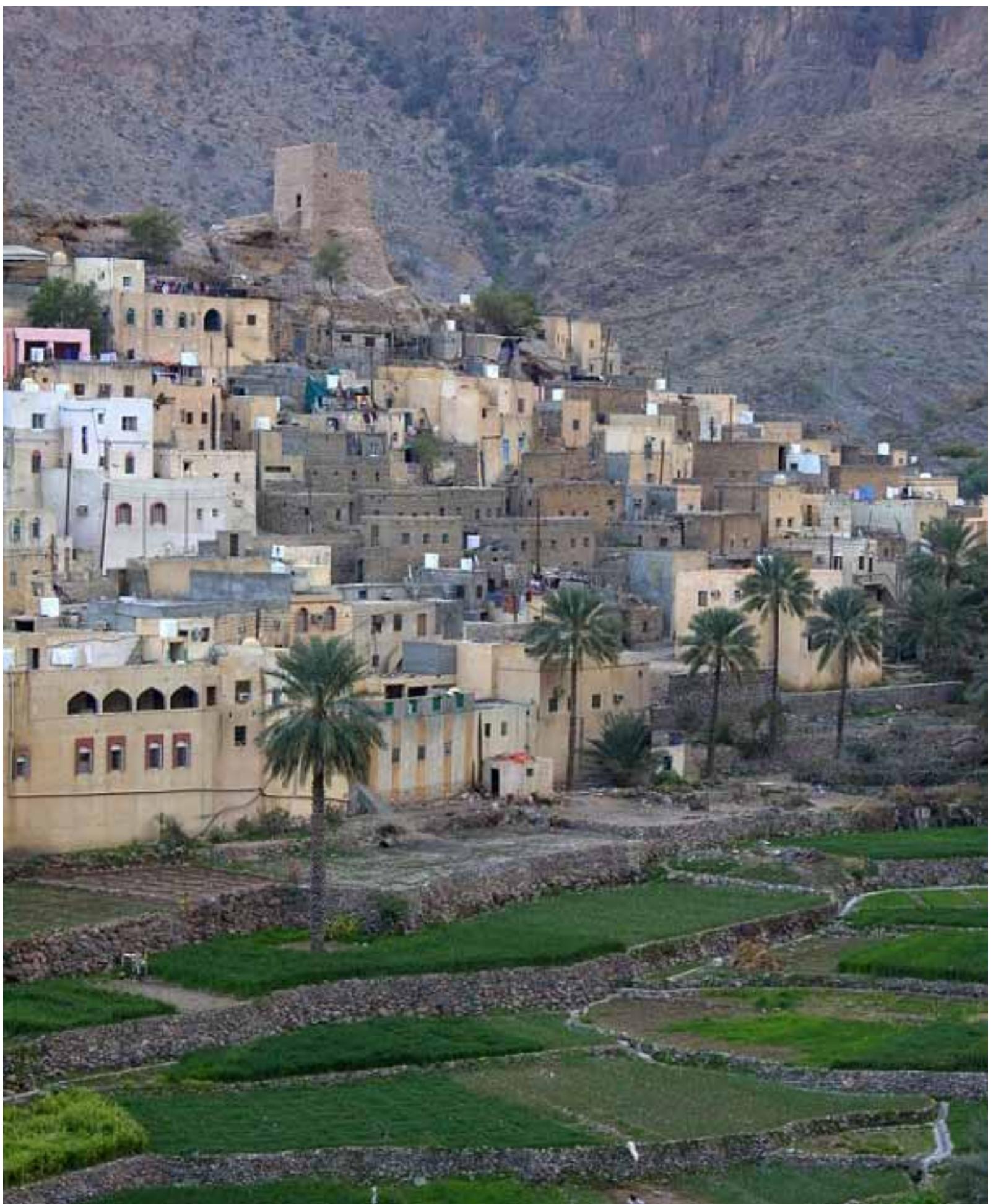
THE SULTANATE OF OMAN IS ONE OF THE MOST DEVELOPED ARAB STATES AND ALSO ONE OF THE MOST UNJUSTLY OVERLOOKED BY TRAVELLERS.

*My husband and I make our first contact with Oman and its well-ordered way of life in the capital Muscat, a city of nearly one million inhabitants that testifies to how modern and advanced the country is. We are welcomed by wide, well-lit four-and-more-lane highways, imposing buildings and modern shopping centres that even Americans would envy. It's hard to believe the advances this desert nation has achieved in just forty years, since Sultan Qaboos bin Said acceded to the throne. Up until 1970, Oman only had a little over five kilometres of asphalt roads, one hospital and three primary schools, which only boys could attend. Now, in a mere four decades, the conditions in the country have for the most part been turned upside down. Distant villages once accessible only on foot or by mule have been brought closer by the construction of new roads, and people who once spent morning, noon and night huddled over a fire talking about their herds today converse using state-of-the-art mobile phones and go about in expensive jeeps and pickups. All this rapid development is of course nothing out of the ordinary if we keep in mind that behind all these advances lies the wealth acquired through the Oman's "black gold". It is this that puts a kilometre-wide smile on the faces of foreign visitors: a litre of petrol will run you a mere 25 cents. This is also the reason why, like many, we opted to hire a car to explore this vast desert country.*



*The neatly ordered, broad streets with signs in the Roman alphabet soon become boring to those with adventure in mind, which is why we soon agreed that we would be needing something more rugged to explore Oman. An all-terrain four-wheel-drive vehicle soon found its way onto our list of essential supplies. This way, we were completely free of limitations in planning our trip; the only thing that could now stand in our way was our (less than) adventurous nature. Despite the fact that Oman covers a huge desert area, it constantly surprised us with the diversity of its highly varied natural surroundings. Lofty mountain ranges offering amazing views, and steep, narrow macadam cart tracks. The highest road in the country lies at 2,000 metres above sea level and takes us right into the heart of Oman's Grand Canyon. At a depth of 1,500 metres, it offers wonderful opportunities for trekking enthusiasts, including a climb up the country's highest mountain, Jebel Shams (or "Mountain of the Sun"), where you will pass the magic 3,000 marker by 48 metres.*





Descending back into the valley from the highest point in the country again puts us in a completely new world, one composed of small, charming villages. Driving over the dried-up river beds and winding our way round the massive stone boulders left here by the waters is what makes renting a 4x4 such a joy. The high rock walls that narrowly rise above us yet again reveal the magnificence of nature. This is also a land of wadis, valleys that sudden rainfall in the winter months can make exceptionally treacherous. They are surrounded by high mountains, from the peaks of which torrents come roaring down in times of rain, carrying with them everything that stands in their way. Despite the drought that reigns in Oman, water is often stored in isolated river beds and pools that are ideal for providing pleasant refreshment in the high temperatures characteristic of this Arab state.

Oman also offers an extensive coastline. This is actually the reason why fishing, along with agriculture, is the country's second most powerful economic sector. The adorable white towns that adorn the coast with countless fishing boats enchant us over and over again. Our exploration is made all the more interesting by the kind, curious local inhabitants, who never fail to greet us with an "as-salam alaykum" and extend a welcome with their wide, sincere smiles. And the boatbuilders, who still craft their typical, 200-tonne fishing dhows entirely by hand and using traditional methods, do not let themselves be bothered as we curiously observe them and marvel at their artistic creations. And it is here that we finally find that typical Omani dish: pita bread and hummus as an appetiser, followed by fish with rice.

And of course even the desert is not to be overlooked in Oman: from the dull rock desert to the always enchanting sandy desert, where dunes rise above to a height of up to 150 metres. We decided to traverse the smallest one, Wahiba, ourselves, and the experience of the drive was truly unforgettable. Despite the wasteland that appears to go on without end, here and there you can nonetheless spy a flock of sheep or herd of camels and typical Bedouin huts, where people carry on the way of life they knew before oil was discovered. Although their dwellings lie off the beaten path, they are all the more kind-hearted, welcoming and enviably simple for it.

Although Oman is still unknown to many, it is already visited by around 1.2 million tourists each year. The country focuses the development of its tourism solely on luxury guests, and this can make travel in Oman scandalously expensive. But while tourism in Oman is still a developing industry, visitors still have the opportunity to camp in the wild free of charge. What could be lovelier than sharing your abode with millions of stars in the sky and a curious herd of camels, while the murmur of the waves carries you off into a peaceful sleep?