

by Kaylee Dall (October 2018)

Having been to Saudi Arabia I thought I knew what to expect going into Oman as they are both oil rich countries on the same peninsula, I was wrong. Oman is a paradise full of palm trees and swimming pools. The traffic actually stays in the perspective lane and the streets are busy with life. They have shopping malls bigger than the ones I grew up going to. The most surprising thing about Oman was the entire German and French tourist; I was mistaken for a German multiple times. We were still the only America group and that shocked a few locals which got us a few Go USA. I felt welcome and treated as if I was at my second home.



On day one of my tour in Oman it started with the grand mosque. The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque is a marvel of Arabian architecture and modern construction techniques. This is one of the main places to visit in Oman and a beautifully designed and constructed mosque, with beautiful elements from the carved wooden doors to inlaid marble work, a massive woven carpet, crystal chandeliers and stained glass. All surrounded by gardens with flowing water and flowers. You walk into the beautiful garden with fountains in the middle leading to the mosque. The mosque is surrounded by white tiles for when there isn't



enough room inside people can pray outside on the tile. The white tiles surrounding this big Beige structure made it look so clean and precise. We took our shoes off before stepping into the inside of the mosque where I learned that the best way to keep people from stealing your shoes during prayer is to put one shoe in one cubby and walk down a way to put the other shoe in another. Inside the mosque was unbelievable, they imported different textiles from all different countries to bring together a beautiful master piece. They had marble from Italy and Swarovski crystal chandeliers. The carpet spanned the whole floor and was made for the mosque. All these pieces puzzled together to make more than a grand mosque but a master piece.

We then saw the women prayer room which had TVs on the wall to stream the live prayer. They also had crystal chandeliers and a beautiful color combination of red, brown and white. The group continued after the mosque to the Bait Al Zubair Museum which showed the culture of Oman from how the women dressed to the old currency and stamps.

We drove down the street from the museum to the souq. As soon as we got there we looked across the street to the water and saw the sultan's two yachts but really you could call them two mini cruise ships as they were massive. A well-stocked lively souq that can be overwhelming with shopkeepers calling out to you but great gifts including perfumes and clothes are available along with a multitude of other trinkets. A polite "thank you but no thank you" is more readily accepted in Mutrah than Dubai. Politeness counts for a lot in Oman.



We continued to Al Alam Palace, The palace is not residential but principally used to welcome foreign dignitaries. It is a clean very well presented area. The design was slightly Indian as it was an Indian company who built it. On either side you could see the Old Portuguese forts Mirani and Jalali. When you turned around the mountains rose up high in a glorious manner with old watch tower randomly scattered across the mountains.

For lunch that day we had a four course meal at this little hotel restaurant. Each dish was exquisitely plated and tasted even better. The proportions were perfect and we never waited for the next course. It felt like a 5 star meal I would have in the United States.

The following day we started our drive to Nizwa which was two hours. The drive was beautiful with the mountains slowly surrounding us. Nizwa is a must see location for any visitor/tourist to Oman. Nizwa has traditionally been the seat of local culture and education, so not surprisingly it's much more traditional than the illustrious, neighboring Muscat, the capital of Oman. But if you want to explore Northern Oman, Nizwa is unavoidable as it is surrounded by all the major tourist spots, and itself has Nizwa Fort, situated in the lovely Souq. The first stop in Nizwa was the souq which was in the vicinity of the walls of the famous Nizwa Fort. This one was extremely clean and in building vs a labyrinthine alleyway. We started in the date shop; they had to have 10-20 different types of dates I didn't know even existed. We then saw the Oman sweet factory where they make the traditional sweets; it was like the taste of dates but dulled down and with rose water. We continued through to the vegetable and fruit market where they had stalls and it was messier than the first part of the souq but this part was filled with color. Then to the spice shops that were like in the ally system of a normal souq. The smells were amazing and just surrounded you from all sides. The colors and textures made wonderful pictures. After we walked thought we had time to shop at the handmade crafts section which was mostly pottery and silver. This was such a calm environment compared to the souq in Muscat, no one yelling at you to buy something.



The castle will take you right to the past, with a really good collection displayed wonderfully. It gives a whole perspective of the life back then...right from the rooms to jewelry, to arms, and to currency. Apart from battle vantage points, you can see the food storage locations, living quarters, and relics from the past. The fort is huge and provides an interesting peep in the past and the role of Nizwa when the country was still an Imamate. This Fort with its enormous round tower built in the 17th century by Imam Sultan Bin Saif Al Ya' Aruba to defend the route to the interior. The best part was climbing up to the fort as it was round and in the middle you could see through the canon holes to see the city. Then you could climb more starts in three spots to see the unbelievable view of the old and new city and the exquisite mosque and mountains in the background. Not to miss the amazing panoramas of the surrounding date palms and the majestic mountains, from the top of the fort. Once done with exploring the Fort you can sit in the small 'coffee shop' also in the fort, and absorb the tales of the passing travelers or just observe the locals.



For lunch that day we had a traditional Omani food buffet. The fish and lamb was so flavorful and there were three different rice options. I left the group after lunch and drove back to Muscat through the mountains while the rain was moving through and it was absolutely beautiful.

Overall my time in Oman was short but will be well remembered. It was great to meet and see all the people in Oman and experience the Omani culture for two days.

