

## **MUST DO MUSCAT**

Appreciate all the beauty, charm and wonder in the resplendent capital of the Sultanate of Oman, Muscat, on your next escapade abroad. Not only are flights to the region on the increase but so too are the ports of call in the world of cruising: Royal Caribbean, MSC Cruises and Azamara now all visit the enticing shores of this welcoming Sultanate.

Pending on how much time you have up your sleeve, here are out Top 7 suggestions regarding what to see and do while in Muscat.

### 1. Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque:

Opened between 9am – 11am for Western tourists the Grand Mosque truly is the pearl in the centre of this city. The Grand Mosque was a gift from Sultan Qaboos to his people and has been opened since 2001 and is the second largest mosque in the Gulf. The most impressive feature is the design of the interior carpet in the prayer hall. Weighing 21 tonnes, it took four years to make and brings together the classical Tabriz, Kashan and Isfahan design traditions and covers 4,343 square metres of the men's prayer hall. The Swarovski chandelier above the praying hall is 14 meters tall and holds over 1000 light bulbs.

### 2. A night at the Royal Opera House:

Spend an elegant evening dining at one of the new upmarket restaurants in the Galleria of the Royal Opera House, try Al Angham, famous for its frankincense ice-cream dessert, before ascending the stairs to the dramatic and evocative Royal Opera House for an evening performance of ballet, opera or concert. Yet another gift to his people by His Majesty, this architectural marvel was completed in 2011. White marble, teak-wood balustrades, plush red carpet greet you at every turn while your senses come to life in another dimension thanks to the hi-tech auditoriums featuring Marconi technology. Purchase tickets online and view the schedule to see who is in town as Andrea Bocelli, Dianne Krall and Paco Pena have all been to this marvellous venue.

### 3. Get Shopping:

Two choices come to mind when recommending great places to shop in Muscat - Muttrah Souq & Muscat City Centre, both reflecting the old and the new Oman. Muttrah Souq is one of the oldest souqs (markets) in the region. Nestled, almost hidden, in a cove off the Old Port the small souq is a labyrinth of alley ways offering you gold, silver, silk pashminas, colourful kaftans, frankincense and handicrafts. Vendors are welcoming and not aggressive or annoying as in some other parts of the world. For modern labels like Zara, H&M, Charles & Keith, Body Works – head to Muscat City Centre or the Grand Mall. LuLu Hypermarket is also good for those who wish to bring back dates, chai tea and curry mixes.

### 4. Stroll through Muscat's Old Town:

The white-washed, once gated former centre of town is ever so serene and pretty. Walk through its quiet streets and take photos of the ceremonial palace, Al Alam, and of its two protective Forts: Mirani and Jalali, flanking the two opposing hill tops.

5. Get a dose of local culture:

A visit to Gallery Sarah, Bait Al Muzna and Bait Al Zubair is highly recommended. The Omani Art scene is on the up and up. View contemporary artworks at Gallery Sarah and Bait Al Muzna by local and international artists, then pop into Bait Al Zubair Museum to put it all into perspective as Omani culture is displayed and explained in full, from weaponry, local dress to housing.

6. Go sailing to the surrounding islands, snorkel, dive or swim with dolphins:

Oman's coastline from north to south covers over 3,000km with archipelagos, sunken wrecks and a rich marine life featuring a coral reef, giant fish and turtles. Enjoy a lazy BBQ on the beach, go snorkelling or say 'hi' to flipper. The sea will regenerate you!

7. Go people watching along Shatti Al Qurum Beach (Lover's Way):

This is *the* spot to enjoy a healthy dose of people watching at any time of the day. The long stretch of white sand attracts joggers early in the morning, picnic makers at lunch, soccer players in the afternoon and couples into the evening as it has the best vantage point for a golden Muscat sunset as well as being populated by cafes and shisha bars along the waterfront. Watch locals pull in their fishing nets while kids splash about. Just make sure you bring your camera along.

This is just a taste of the Sultanate. Get lost in the journey and enjoy uncovering the magic and charm in Arabia's best kept secret – Oman.

**Useful resources:**

Oman Air Holidays: offers attractive stopover deals. Please check our website:

[www.holidays.omanair.com](http://www.holidays.omanair.com)

Oman Tourism website: [www.experienceoman.com](http://www.experienceoman.com)