

ENTHUSIAST TRAVEL

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The
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Issue



YES, THERE'S SAND (LOTS OF IT).
BUT THIS TRANQUIL OASIS
ON THE TIP OF THE ARABIAN
PENINSULA IS NOTHING
LIKE WHAT YOU'D EXPECT.



MAN

by Hanya Yanagihara
photographs by Paola & Murray



I

In Oman, people like to tell you how wrong you are about the weather. They do so with a sort of grim triumph, as if reminding you that your bouncy American optimism doesn't work here. "It's a beautiful day!" you might chirp to Rashid, the man who'll drive you in a Land Cruiser deep into the Wahiba Sands, the nearly 5,000-square-mile desert that abuts Yemen and where you'll be camping in a goat-hair tent for the night. There will be silence. Then, "very windy," Rashid might reply ominously, looking up at the sky, which is a bright, cartoonish blue against which a few cumulus clouds are pinned, fat and immobile. What a downer, you'll think, settling back in your seat. Rashid doesn't know what he's talking about.

Two hours later, you'll be in the goat-hair tent. The wind will be blowing so fiercely, so unrelentingly, that within ten minutes, everything will look as if it's been coated with a layer of ash. Everything—your fresh-pressed pomegranate juice, your hair, your eyes—will be filmed with white, finer-than-sugar sand. "Very windy!" Rashid will shout over the gales, and you will nod, glumly.

The weather was the first way I was wrong about Oman. The landscape was the second. I thought: Middle East. Therefore: Desert. Hot. Dry. And although Oman is in fact partly desert (and hot, in parts), it is also mountainous, and coastal, and even pastoral. It is also climatically fickle: Temperatures drop and soar in the space of a day. Sandstorms appear seemingly out of nowhere and then vanish as abruptly as they

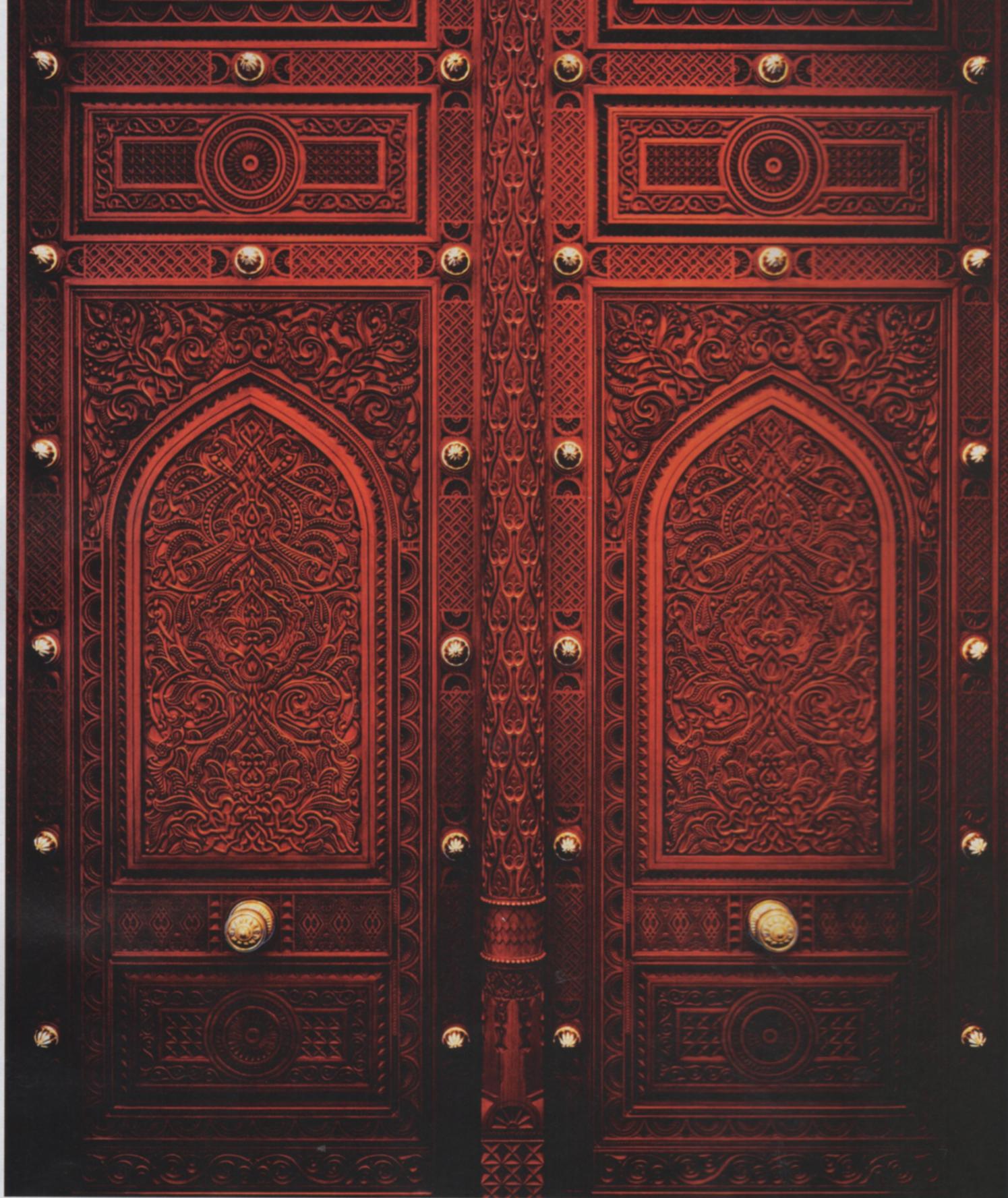
began. In the capital, Muscat, it will rain, hard, for an hour, and then suddenly turn sunny and clear. The weather reminded me of spending time with a toddler: There were disagreeable periods, but then they ended, and it was difficult to feel resentful.

When you tell people you're going to Oman, they have one of two reactions. One is confusion: "Where?" The other is disbelief: "Why?" And indeed, Oman, which is nestled between Yemen to its south and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to its west (with Iran just across the sea to its north), isn't exactly an obvious destination for Americans. Yet despite its neighbors, the country—which is roughly the size of Italy, with a population of just under five million—is a revelation: a safe, secure patch of the Middle East that's not only an antidote to the glittery artifice of Dubai (the only place in the region that Americans visit in significant numbers) but also a series of astonishing topographies, each more impressive than the last. It is also very confident about its potential; the country hopes to become a tourist destination not just for the Gulf States residents and Europeans who already visit in decent numbers but for Americans as well, for whom the idea of spending their two weeks' vacation in an area they know only for strife and terror is a difficult sell.

And yet the country is not just a literal oasis but also a geopolitical one: It is Oman that served as the mediator between Iran and the United States in the most recent round of nuclear talks, and Oman that secured the release of the three American hikers who were detained in Iran in 2009. A country's relative friendliness toward the United States doesn't necessarily make it any more inherently desirable as a holiday destination—but it is worth remembering that when we start dismissing places solely based on their neighbors, we often miss seeing something wonderful in exchange.

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Previous page: Sand dunes ripple across the Wahiba Desert, in northeastern Oman, where storms can whip up unexpectedly. This page: A minaret towers above a date palm oasis outside the village of Birkat Al-Mawz.





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Above: Carved wooden doors at Muscat's Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

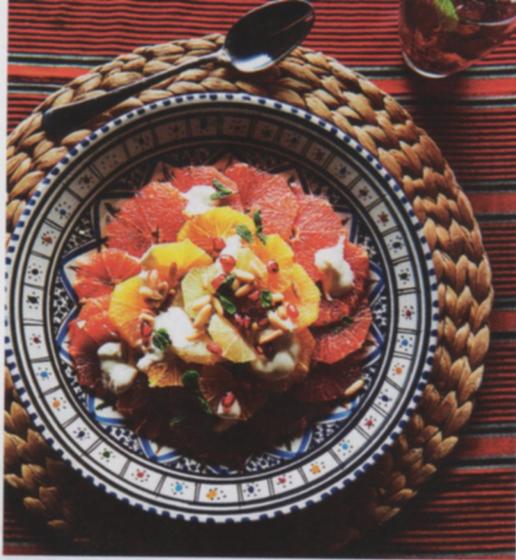
Right: Coves along the coast of Zighy Bay draw scuba divers.

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WHEN TO GO

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Clockwise from top left: Breakfast at Hud Hud's desert campsite; a greeter at the entrance to Six Senses Zighy Bay; the saltwater pool at the same hotel; the sandstone entryway at the capital city's Grand Mosque.



EVERYONE BEGINS their trip to Oman in Muscat, a low-slung, modest, dun-colored town that feels more like an exurb than the country's capital. Muscat is worth visiting mostly for its main attraction, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, which occupies more than 4,447,000 square feet and is home to the world's second-largest carpet (45,208 square feet) and second-largest chandelier (46 feet high). Despite these extravagances, and the acres of glittery white marble, the mosque is less ostentatious than it might be; there are beautiful carved wooden panels and elaborate stained glass windows everywhere you look, but it really is an actual place of worship, not a fantasy of one. And yet the mood is festive, even joyful: Aside from the groups of Western tourists, the rest of the visitors are from across the Gulf: Indians and Saudis and Qataris and Pakistanis, the men in thobes, the women in hijab, the children running around and shrieking, everyone wielding a selfie stick. The Omani guards look on, indulgent. Here, as in the rest of the country, the atmosphere is more relaxed than you might expect, the people apparently unruffled.

The mosque, which was completed in 2001, is named for Oman's 75-year-old Sultanate, Qaboos bin Said al Said, who overthrew his father in 1970 and has been ruling ever since. It's he who is considered largely responsible for ushering the state into its modern condition (improving infrastructure, creating jobs) and judiciously engaging in global affairs (Qaboos has managed to be on good terms with both the United States and Iran), and also for the country's current pursuit of tourism. Unlike many of its neighbors', Oman's oil reserves aren't infinite, which makes attracting visitors not just an interesting experiment but a necessity.

Qaboos is beloved here. "The Sultan, bless him," said my driver, an otherwise taciturn man, as we began the two-hour drive out of Muscat and up to my next destination, Jabal Akhdar, some of the country's highest and most beautiful mountains. "He is a great man." Part of this was tradition, not to mention the law: It is illegal to criticize the Sultan. But it also reminded me of the sort of hero worship that, say, the Singaporeans have for their former prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew. Like Qaboos, Lee, who died last year, built his city-state—a place with few resources and not much land—from a forgotten backwater into a rich and self-sustaining society. Unlike Lee, however, who was succeeded by one of his sons, Qaboos has no clear successor, which makes people nervous: Who will carry on the Sultan's work?

One hopes that whoever does so will be as vigilant about protecting the land as this ruler has been. Jabal Akhdar is part of the 186-mile-long Al Hajar Range that creeps along the country's northern border, and is scarred by dramatically deep gullies; from my hotel, the Alila Jabal Akhdar—one of three luxury properties currently open or being developed in the area—it looks as if the Grand Canyon and the Rockies have been Photoshopped into one extravagant image.

The mountains have long been a respite for Omanis; in the summer, when the lowlands become unbearable, the air is brisk and fresh, the nights inky black, the stars winkingly bright, the land colored a dusty green with olive trees. (In the spring, when I was there, the hotel is populated by Westerners, largely British expats based in the region, vacationing over break.)

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HOW TO GO

The easiest way is to take Emirates or Etihad from New York or Washington, D.C.; both fly to Muscat, connecting in Dubai or Abu Dhabi, respectively.

WHAT TO PACK

Dress for the heat, of course, but be modest about it: Omanis are fairly tolerant of foreigners and our sartorial permissiveness, but both women and men are required to have their arms, shoulders, and legs covered if they want to enter the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. (Women don't need to have their heads covered in general, though, and not all Omani women do, either.) And bring a lightweight shawl for protection from the sun as well as the occasional sandstorm.

TO DRINK OR NOT

Alcohol is forbidden to Omanis; it is, however, available to foreigners at most high-end hotels—check before you book. Same thing for mobile camps: Hud Hud doesn't have its own liquor license, for example, but you can buy wine or spirits at duty-free and bring them along.

But mostly, the area is known for its production of roses, from which the country's rosewater—used for cooking, healing, and religious ceremonies—is made. I am a month too early to witness the rose harvest, which usually begins in April, but the next day a guide and I drive high into the mountains before beginning a walk through some of the terraced steps that turn the hillside into a series of tidy, cascading pleats.

The rose bushes are still fallow, but the apricot trees are beginning to bud, and sun-drunk bees wobble dozily around their bunches of white blossoms. After an hour of walking, my guide hikes back up the skinny, treacherous path cut out of the mountainside to retrieve the car, and I continue on a thin dirt channel that winds through a series of farms—too few and too small to really make a proper village—which will lead me to the road, where we'll meet. The mountain is steep enough that I have to concentrate on where I step; the earth is dry and crumbly beneath me, and with every footfall, I feel myself skidding a few inches downhill. After a while, I stop. Above me, the sky is a clear, bright blue, broken only by a few tendrils of white smoke threading up from unseen chimneys. Around me are spindly, spiky pomegranate trees, the last of their fruit mummifying on their branches, and almond trees blowy with pale-pink flowers. It is completely silent. I wait in the hot air and experience one of those moments you find less frequently these days and which are therefore more precious: in which you no longer know where you are, or even when you are; when the world of skyscrapers and warfare seems an abstraction, a dream, and what's before you—the good, clean smell of bark and hot soil—is the only thing that's real.

It would be naive, and too pat, to say that in those minutes the world of contemporary geopolitics, not to mention Oman's own localized difficulties—an uncertain future, grumblings about too much bureaucracy, an ever-growing gulf between the moneyed and the poor—seemed more theoretical than not, things easy to forget and incidental to such beauty. But it would also be true. There, among the orchards of flowering trees, it felt not only possible that this should be a place worth visiting, but necessary—a dream of peace in a region never celebrated for it.

A

As surprising as the Omani mountains are, however, I am really here to see what I thought I'd see: the desert. And so the next day I am picked up by the aforementioned Rashid and driven another two hours south, deep into the Wahiba Sands, the vast dunes in the country's northeast, for a night in a tent arranged by Hud Hud, a luxury mobile camp operator that arranges private stays in different locations across the country.

I can tell you that for most of us, this area is what we think of when we think of Oman, and yet doing so minimizes how majestic, how otherworldly, the experience of seeing it is for the first time. The startling thing is how abruptly the landscape announces itself. One minute you're driving through scrubland, and then, suddenly, the dusty dirt road transforms itself into something else altogether. Gone, at once, are the tidy Bedouin encampments that punctuate the desert's borders, their striped blanket walls flapping crisply in the wind; here, instead, are swooping parabolas of apricot-colored sand, audaciously feminine in their curves. Adding to the sense of dislocation are the camels you sometimes pass—lumbering, or folded into catlike crouches, staring at nothing—and the complete silence. The silence, in fact, is the most overwhelming, and occasionally unsettling aspect of the desert: At night, when the wind has quieted itself, it seems to scream, an absence of sound made into a presence.

But here, too, it is possible to be wrong about Oman. Just as you are wrong when you think of Oman as monolithic in politics or climate, you are equally wrong when you confuse the desert's sinuousness, its lack of anything sharp or hard-edged, for placidity. Because of all the landscapes you'll find here, it is this one that is the least friendly, the most ferocious: Although the sand has been wafting, gently, romantically, soon after we enter it quickly becomes the equivalent of a blizzard, so choking that I can do nothing but sit in my tent, a scarf wrapped around my entire head, including my eyes, trying to read with a flashlight, my book fattening itself with

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Hud Hud's encampments include living rooms that can be moved outdoors at sunset.



sand. It is the most extreme weather I have ever experienced—unlike snow, it is inescapable; unlike rain, it is uncontrollable—and it gave me new respect for the people who live in this land, where you are always reminded not only of the caprice of nature but of your own powerlessness against it. Living in a place like this inspires not only humility but also a sense of resignation. “When is it going to be over?” I shout over the wind to Rashid, who shrugs. “At nightfall,” he guesses. “Inshallah.”

And then, just when I begin resigning myself to the fact that the sandstorm will never end, it does. The staff bustle into action, beating the sand from my bed, refastening the long metal pins that hold my tent walls to one another, lighting the scores of votives that crowd the low table in the living room tent, filling my tin can shower with hot water, and presenting me with dish after dish of simple but delicious regional meze: stewed eggplant and chunky, grainy hummus and miniature falafel the size of grapes. Later, when I go to bed in my now miraculously sandless bed, my tent hung with glowing solar lamps, the air outside cool and clear and so still that I can see, very far in the distance, smudges of camels making their way back to their feeding posts for the night, I wonder if I dreamed the entire episode—if, in the end, it was all a mirage, a hallucination of the desert rather than the real thing.

B

But that’s the thing about Oman—you may never know. Two days later, I am at my final destination, the Six Senses Zighy Bay resort. If you imagine Oman as a gourd with a little cap atop it, I am in the cap, near the northern tip of the Musandam Peninsula. Like every other landscape here, this one is dramatic: a series of folding cliffs that drop down to a white-sand beach and water that’s the kind of blue you find only in children’s drawings of the ocean. In the mornings, I eat eggs scrambled with onions and cilantro; in the afternoon, I eat fresh dates; and in the evening, I have whatever the local catch is, grilled and served with cucumbers. In between, I swim in the ocean, in those impossible waters (which I have all to myself—the other guests, mostly British couples and families from across the Gulf States, stick to their private plunge pools), and as I float on my back, I think again what I thought in the desert: Mirage or not? Hallucination or real?

It’s real, of course. Which is part of what makes it all so thrilling. On my last night at the resort, I am taken out in a renovated *dhow*, an old sailing vessel that is rented out for sundown cruises. There are little cheese puffs, and—because we are in the Persian Gulf, beyond the reach of a liquor license—sparkling date juice instead of champagne, and as we purr through the dark-blue waters, we pass a dozen fishing boats heading home for the day, their occupants waving and smiling at us as we pass.

Then, one of the stewards calls to me and points at something in the distance. “Iran,” he announces, so I look. And there it is: a sand-colored haze on the horizon, close enough so that I think I can see the blurry outlines of buildings. It is a place I’ve always wanted to go, and for much of my life, it was only a desire, never a possibility. But here I am, almost there already, squinting at its shore from a place I also never thought I would see. And really, isn’t that what travel is? A chance to reckon with what you want to see versus what you really do see, a chance to rethink what you thought you knew—as long as you give the place, wherever it is, the opportunity to work its spell on you. Oman gave me both. It wasn’t what I expected. But I kept my eyes open, even in the sandstorm, and in the end, I saw. *

WHERE TO STAY

After you’ve seen Muscat’s Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and the pretty, if sanitized, Old Quarter—the buildings scrubbed up like stage sets; the medina selling tourist tat—there’s no need to linger. While there, though, base yourself at the [Chedi Muscat](#), which has three lap pools and an extravagant breakfast buffet. There’s something of a building boom in the Jabal Akhdar Mountains—an [Anantara](#) is slated to open this fall—but for sheer views, there’s little more spectacular than the intimate [Alila](#), right on the lip of a gorge. The hotel offers well-considered hikes and day-trips, and the spa is superlative.

It’s also a nice idyll before a night or two of glamping in the desert with [Hud Hud](#). Each camp consists of a large tented living room, individual tents with queen-size beds, and a bathroom with a tin can hot-water shower and drop toilet (there’s no electricity, plumbing, or Wi-Fi). It’ll be just you and your party—the staff stay discreetly out of sight.

Finally, there’s nowhere better to wash the desert sand out of your hair than at the [Six Senses Zighy Bay](#) (from Wahiba Sands, you’ll have to fly to Dubai, then take a two-hour private car ride to the resort). All of the villas come with plunge pools, but if you can, get one on the beach—it’s likely you’ll have the sand all to yourself. The resort, which sits at the foot of a dramatic stretch between the Hajar Mountains and the bay, also offers guests the option of paragliding down to its grounds. H.Y.

The ship-building city of Sur, on the Gulf of Oman, en route from the desert back to Muscat.



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TRAVEL - INSPIRATION - CULTURE

Why You Should Visit Oman, the Gulf's Undiscovered Gem

Written by Hanya Yanagihara
August 29, 2016

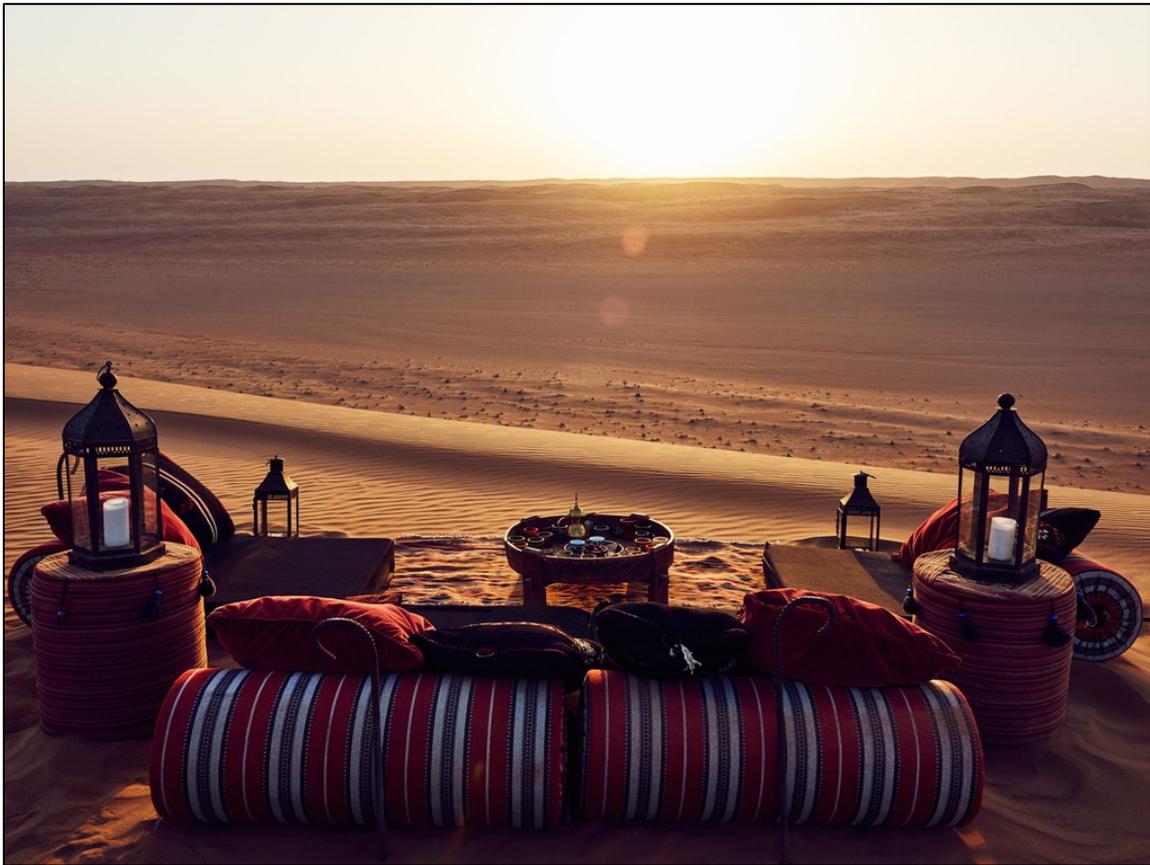


Photo by Paolo and Murray

Hud Hud's encampments in Wahiba Sands include living rooms that can be moved outdoors at sunset

<http://www.cntraveler.com/story/why-you-should-visit-oman-the-gulfs-undiscovered-gem>

Yes, there's sand (lots of it). But this tranquil country on the tip of the Arabian Peninsula is nothing like what you'd expect.

In Oman, people like to tell you how wrong you are about the weather. They do so with a sort of grim triumph, as if reminding you that your bouncy American optimism doesn't work here. "It's a beautiful day!" you might chirp to Rashid, the man who'll drive you in a Land Cruiser deep into the Wahiba Sands, the nearly 5,000-square-mile desert that abuts Yemen and where you'll be camping in a goat-hair tent for the night. There will be silence. Then, "very windy," Rashid might reply ominously, looking up at the sky, which is a bright, cartoonish blue against which a few cumulus clouds are pinned, fat and immobile. What a downer, you'll think, settling back in your seat. Rashid doesn't know what he's talking about.

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The ship-building city of Sur, on the Gulf of Oman, en route from the desert back to the capitol city of Muscat

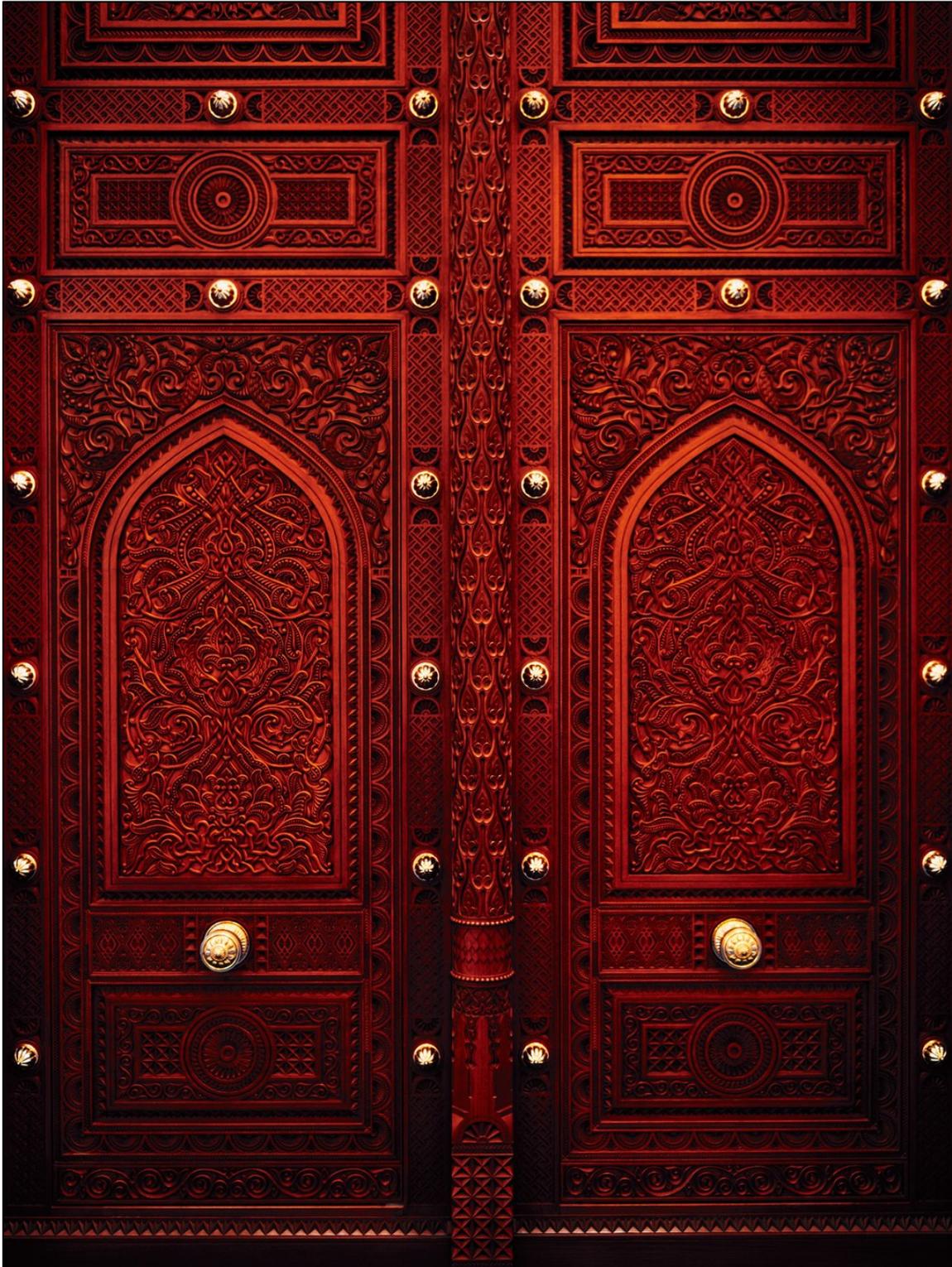
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Everyone begins their trip to Oman in Muscat, a low-slung, modest, dun-colored town that feels more like an exurb than the country's capital. Muscat is worth visiting mostly for its main attraction, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, which occupies more than 4,447,000 square feet and is home to the world's second-largest carpet (45,208 square feet) and second-largest chandelier (46 feet high). Despite these extravagances, and the acres of glittery white marble, the mosque is less ostentatious than it might be; there are beautiful carved wooden panels and elaborate stained glass windows everywhere you look, but it really is an actual place of worship, not a fantasy of one. And yet the mood is festive, even joyful: Aside from the groups of Western tourists, the rest of the visitors are from across the Gulf: Indians and Saudis and Qataris and Pakistanis, the men in thobes, the women in hijab, the children running around and shrieking, everyone wielding a selfie stick. The Omani guards look on, indulgent. Here, as in the rest of the country, the atmosphere is more relaxed than you might expect, the people apparently unruffled.

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The rose bushes are still fallow, but the apricot trees are beginning to bud, and sun-drunk bees wobble dozily around their bunches of white blossoms. After an hour of walking, my guide hikes back up the skinny, treacherous path cut out of the mountainside to retrieve the car, and I continue on a thin dirt channel that wends through a series of farms—too few and too small to really make a proper village—which will lead me to the road, where we’ll meet. The mountain is steep enough that I have to concentrate on where I step; the earth is dry and crumbly beneath me, and with every footfall, I feel myself skidding a few inches downhill. After a while, I stop. Above me, the sky is a clear, bright blue, broken only by a few tendrils of white smoke threading up from unseen chimneys. Around me are spindly, spiky pomegranate trees, the last of their fruit mummifying on their branches, and almond trees blowsy with pale-pink flowers. It is completely silent. I wait in the hot air and experience one of those moments you find less frequently these days and which are therefore more precious: in which you no longer know where you are, or even when you are; when the world of skyscrapers and warfare seems an abstraction, a dream, and what’s before you—the good, clean smell of bark and hot soil—is the only thing that’s real.



Photo by Paolo and Murray

A minaret towers above a date palm oasis outside the village of Birkat Al-Mawz.

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Photo by Paolo and Murray
Breakfast at Hud Hud's desert campsite

But here, too, it is possible to be wrong about Oman. Just as you are wrong when you think of Oman as monolithic in politics or climate, you are equally wrong when you confuse the desert's sinuousness, its lack of anything sharp or hard-edged, for placidity. Because of all the landscapes you'll find here, it is this one that is the least friendly, the most ferocious: Although the sand has been wafting, gently, romantically, soon after we enter it quickly becomes the equivalent of a blizzard, so choking that I can do nothing but sit in my tent, a scarf wrapped around my entire head, including my eyes, trying to read with a flashlight, my book fattening itself with sand. It is the most extreme weather I have ever experienced—unlike snow, it is inescapable; unlike rain, it is uncontainable—and it gave me new respect for the people who live in this land, where you are always reminded not only of the caprice of nature but of your own powerlessness against it. Living in a place like this inspires not only humility but also a sense of resignation. “When is it going to be over?” I shout over the wind to Rashid, who shrugs. “At nightfall,” he guesses. “Inshallah.”

And then, just when I begin resigning myself to the fact that the sandstorm will never end, it does. The staff bustle into action, beating the sand from my bed, refastening the long metal pins that hold my tent walls to one another, lighting the scores of votives that crowd the low table in the living room tent, filling my tin can shower with hot water, and presenting me with dish after dish of simple but delicious regional meze: stewed eggplant and chunky, grainy hummus and miniature falafel the size of grapes. Later, when I go to bed in my now miraculously sandless bed, my tent hung with glowing solar lamps, the air outside cool and clear and so still that I can see, very far in the distance, smudges of camels making their way back to their feeding posts for the night, I wonder if I dreamed the entire episode—if, in the end, it was all a mirage, a hallucination of the desert rather than the real thing.



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Coves along the coast of Zighy Bay draw scuba divers.

But that's the thing about Oman—you may never know. Two days later, I am at my final destination, the Six Senses Zighy Bay resort. If you imagine Oman as a gourd with a little cap atop it, I am in the cap, near the northern tip of the Musandam Peninsula. Like every other landscape here, this one is dramatic: a series of folding cliffs that drop down to a white-sand beach and water that's the kind of blue you find only in children's drawings of the ocean. In the mornings, I eat eggs scrambled with onions and cilantro; in the afternoon, I eat fresh dates; and in the evening, I have whatever the local catch is, grilled and served with cucumbers. In between, I swim in the ocean, in those impossible waters (which I have all to myself—the other guests, mostly British couples and families from across the Gulf States, stick to their private plunge pools), and as I float on my back, I think again what I thought in the desert: Mirage or not? Hallucination or real?

It's real, of course. Which is part of what makes it all so thrilling. On my last night at the resort, I am taken out in a renovated dhow, an old sailing vessel that is rented out for sundown cruises. There are little cheese puffs, and—because we are in the Persian Gulf, beyond the reach of a liquor license—sparkling date juice instead of champagne, and as we purr through the dark-blue waters, we pass a dozen fishing boats heading home for the day, their occupants waving and smiling at us as we pass.

Then, one of the stewards calls to me and points at something in the distance. "Iran," he announces, so I look. And there it is: a sand-colored haze on the horizon, close enough so that I think I can see the blurry outlines of buildings. It is a place I've always wanted to go, and for much of my life, it was only a desire, never a possibility. But here I am, almost there already, squinting at its shore from a place I also never thought I would see. And really, isn't that what travel is? A chance to reckon with what you want to see versus what you really do see, a chance to rethink what you thought you knew—as long as you give the place, wherever it is, the opportunity to work its spell on you. Oman gave me both. It wasn't what I expected. But I kept my eyes open, even in the sandstorm, and in the end, I saw.



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Sand dunes ripple across the Wahiba Desert in northeastern Oman

OMAN HOW-TO

When to Go

Oman is generally warm year-round, with daytime temperatures in the 70s and 80s (just be forewarned that at night, especially in the mountains and the desert, those temperatures can drop into the low 60s). Avoid May through August, when it'll be in the 100s.

How to Go

The easiest way is to take Emirates or Etihad from New York or Washington, D.C.; both fly to Muscat, connecting in Dubai or Abu Dhabi, respectively.

What to Pack

Dress for the heat, of course, but be modest about it: Omanis are fairly tolerant of foreigners and our sartorial permissiveness, but both women and men are required to have their arms, shoulders, and legs covered if they want to enter the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. (Women don't need to have their heads covered in general, though, and not all Omani women do, either.) And bring a lightweight shawl for protection from the sun as well as the occasional sandstorm.

To Drink or Not

Alcohol is forbidden to Omanis; it is, however, available to foreigners at most high-end hotels—check before you book. Same thing for mobile camps: Hud Hud doesn't have its own liquor license, for example, but you can buy wine or spirits at duty-free and bring them along.

Where to Stay

After you've seen Muscat's Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and the pretty, if sanitized, Old Quarter—the buildings scrubbed up like stage sets; the medina selling tourist tat—there's no need to linger. While there, though, base yourself at the Chedi Muscat, which has three lap pools and an extravagant breakfast buffet. There's something of a building boom in the Jabal Akhdar Mountains—an Anantara is slated to open this fall—but for sheer views, there's little more spectacular than the intimate Alila, right on the lip of a gorge. The hotel offers well-considered hikes and day-trips, and the spa is superlative.

It's also a nice idyll before a night or two of glamping in the desert with Hud Hud. Each camp consists of a large tented living room, individual tents with queen-size beds, and a bathroom with a tin can hot-water shower and drop toilet (there's no electricity, plumbing, or Wi-Fi). It'll be just you and your party—the staff stay discreetly out of sight.

Finally, there's nowhere better to wash the desert sand out of your hair than at the Six Senses Zighy Bay (from Wahiba Sands, you'll have to fly to Dubai, then take a two-hour private car ride to the resort). All of the villas come with plunge pools, but if you can, get one on the beach—it's likely you'll have the sand all to yourself. The resort, which sits at the foot of a dramatic stretch between the Hajar Mountains and the bay, also offers guests the option of paragliding down to its grounds.