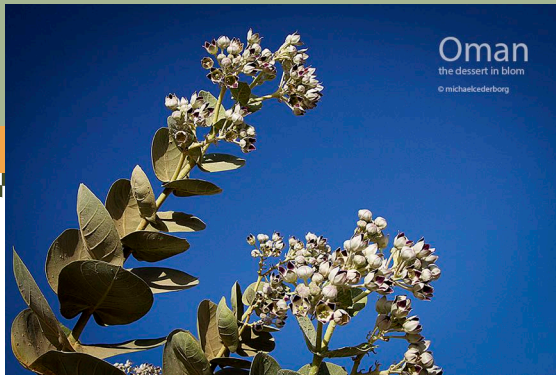


# Oman



## Salalah and the Empty Quarters

2008



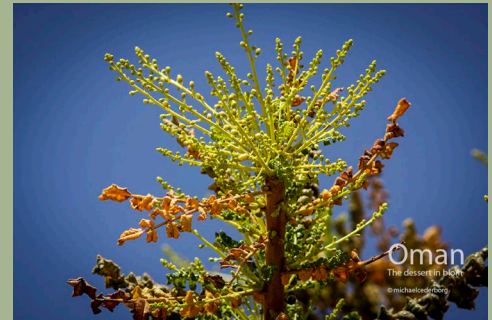
## Visit Oman – few tourists here...

We had been thinking of going to Oman for quite some time. We found a good arrangement with direct flights and a hotel-package on the beach for a week. Works well when you are travelling with kids. An all-inclusive set-up turned out to be much cheaper compared with booking flights and hotel separately – especially when you are 6 travelling. Stockholm – Salalah takes 7 hours by flight. This gave us flexibility then to arrange any and all local excursions in Oman.

Oman is a safe country to visit and to move around in. This goes for the cities as well as the country-side. The only thing about staying in Salalah, which was fine with the great beaches, was that we missed out on Muscat, the capital.

There are many local guides to choose from. We selected Ali Al-Shahary, [alishaharya@yahoo.com](mailto:alishaharya@yahoo.com). You will need a guide with a 4-wheel drive vehicle if planning to go out into the desert though. It is best to hire your own guide, thereby avoiding the group arrangements in minibuses. This gives you also more flexibility. The market in Salalah is OK if not spectacular. You will find the usual stuff at their stands. Incense is sold a lot here. Hard bargaining is a must. There are two really good hotels to choose from The Hilton and the Crowne Plaza. Both 5-star hotels. We stayed at the Crowne Plaza. There are different restaurants to choose from and also a buffet if that's what you fancy. There are also a few quite good local restaurants in Salalah to try out.





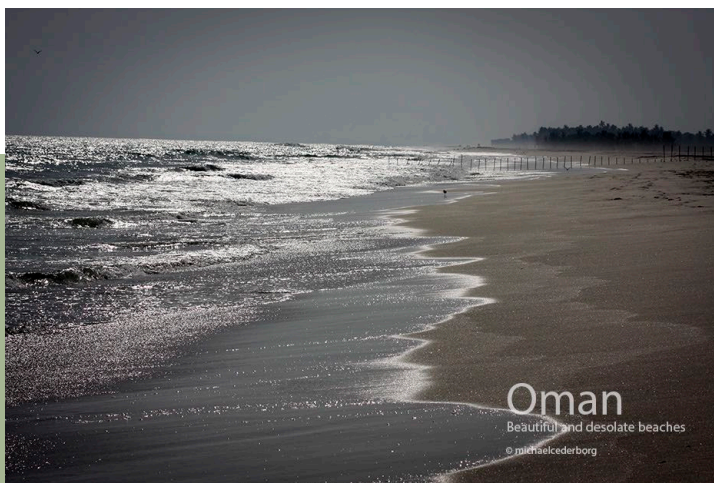
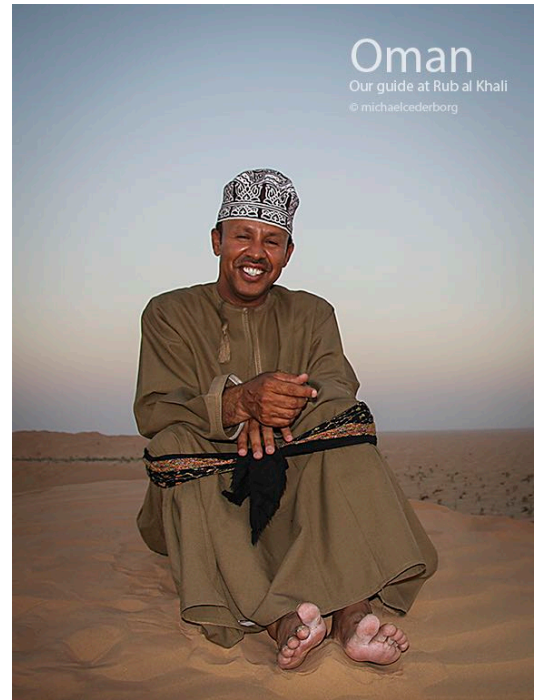
## Two-day trip to The Empty Quarters

If there is anything which will leave a lasting impression – then it is visiting and spending time in the desert with sand dunes. We arranged a two-day tour including an overnight out in the desert at a Bedouin camp in the very north of Oman close to the Saudi Arabian border.

Having been to deserts in various places, these dunes of the Empty Quarters in northern Oman are among the most beautiful. To sit high up on a dune and just wait for the sun to settle is truly a magical experience. There are no people or houses anywhere to be seen. **The roads are OK up to the city of Tumrait**, where we stock-up on food and drinks. This is the last outpost before going in to the desert. When going in to the sandy parts of the desert one needs to stop and let out some air of the tires in order not to get stuck.

On the way to our dunes, we **make a stop at the ancient village of Ubar**. This place is also known as the Atlantis of the sands. There are ruins here marking very old settlements from the days when the caravans came through with their spices and herbs on the route up to Damascus and other places. It is also worth stopping at **Wadi Dawkah Frankincense national park**. This is however further down towards Salalah. Here the Frankincense trees giving the scene/herbs which they harvest and sell. Wadi Dawkah Frankincense park is about 35 km north of Salalah and can be done separately as a ½ day tour. There are over 2000 trees here **and the park is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site**. We were told there is only one Bedouin clan who are allowed to harvest this very rare and expensive sap made into perfume.

It is quite hilly around here and the landscape is barren, but beautiful.





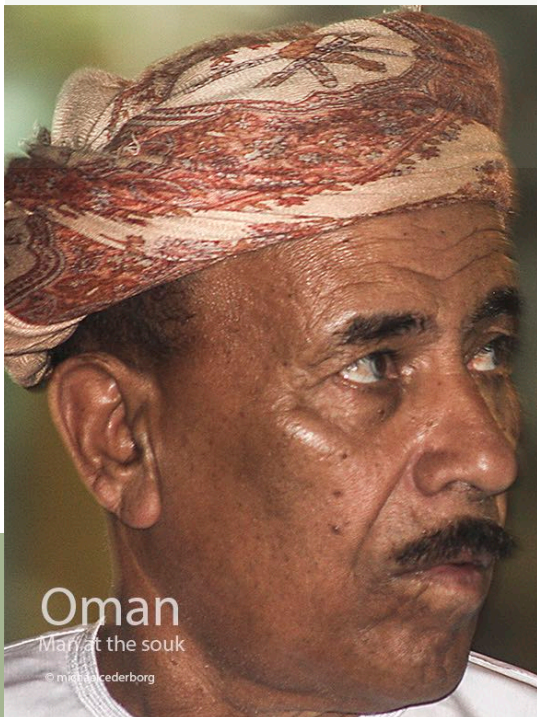
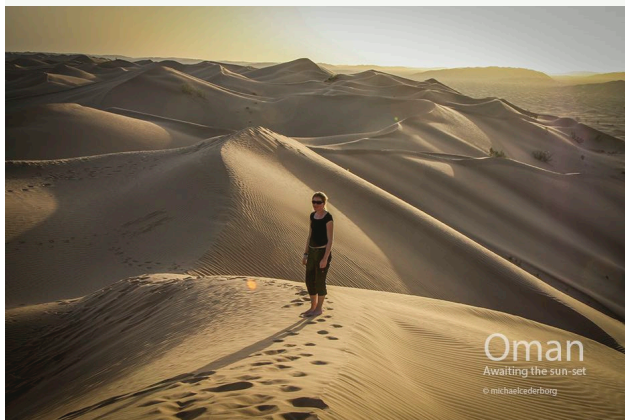
## Sleeping in the dessert

The Empty Quarters starts at 4-5 hours' drive north of Salalah. The last hour you drive through the dessert on no roads. Again, the air partially needs to be let out in order not to get stuck in the sand. To drive up the dunes and back down in high speed is exhilarating and a fun experience. We do meet some Bedouins with the sheep and camels scattered around.

After arriving to the dunes in the afternoon, we then spend the rest of the day just enjoying the quietness and sitting on the dunes watching the incredible sights. We also await the sun-set which is spectacular of course.

We travel back down a little bit and make camp adjacent to a Bedouin settlement. We are served food and drink and prepare ourselves for the evening and night. The temperatures vary quite a bit out in the dessert from around 30 degrees mid-day to very chilly nights. We have brought sweaters and are also given double and triple blankets for the night. It is quite hard to sleep on the mattresses which they have provided for us. It is pitch dark apart from a sky filled with stars. The boys are eaten badly at night by the sand mosquitos unfortunately.

The kids are still small enough wanting to ride on the camels, which they do and enjoy. It is not easy especially when the camel is getting up and down from the ground.





## The Frankincense tree

The Dhofar mountains are worth seeing. Here is an old fort which we make a stop at in Taqah. The fort has been home to a Sheik in the old days. It is recommended also to make boat trip excursion for fishing, snorkeling and diving. We spend a few days at leisure just on the beach sun-bathing and reading books.

Other things to see in close proximity of Salalah includes, Jobs Grave up in the mountain, the Sumhuran castle ruins by the sea. The Wadi Darbat waterfalls and the Taqah castle is worth a visit. We also stopped to look at Sultan Qaboos mosque in Salalah.

Ask an Omani when his birthday is and chances are he will tell you January first. This is the date the authority has chosen for many Omanis when they need to have a license for something, as they often do not know their actual birthdate. Oman has an over 7000-year-old history harvesting the sap/resin from the Frankincense trees which is burned as an incense giving a pleasant smell. They are only really found in the Dhofar mountains outside of Salalah. According to the bible, Jesus Christ, was given gold, incense and myrrh from Oman by the three wise men. The incense was transported with the camel caravans through the dessert (Empty Quarters) to other neighboring Arab nations, and then also by boat to Rome, Italy.

