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American Press Continues To Highlight Oman As A Safe Wonderful Destination

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Usama Al Haremi
H-CC&M

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Usama Bin Karim Al Haremi, Head of Corporate Communications And Media of Oman Air notified that American and other writers beside travel experts remain fascinated by Oman, the oasis of peace and frankincense, which is becoming a much highly thought of tourist destination worldwide. American, Canadian, Far Eastern and other media outlets, beside various websites worldwide have vastly published the article titled "For the Middle East of storybooks, try Oman," by Shelley Emling, a well-known American journalist. The story was sent out by Cox News Service, and distributed via The New York Times News service on Monday, November 10, 2008. Founded in 1898, Cox Enterprises is one of America's leading media businesses. The company owns fifteen television stations, 81 radio stations, and a large cable television enterprise including the Travel Channel.

The interdiction reads, "Mommy, I think I have some camel meat stuck in my teeth." Now there's something I don't hear my 8-year-old daughter say every day. But then, we weren't on an everyday kind of American family vacation. My husband, Scott, my three children and I were in Oman, a place so remote that some of my friends had to look it up on their globes. Though we didn't know it at the time, this Middle Eastern gem bordering Saudi Arabia has been named by many travel guides as a major hot spot for 2009. We spent nine days in October in this exotic state on the Arabian Sea, dividing our time between Muscat, the capital, and Salalah, a port city in the far south bordered by some of the most beautiful beaches I've ever seen.

The eating of camel meat came smack in the middle, when we opted to break away from our five-star luxury hotel and trek out into the remote Empty Quarter - the world's largest sand desert - for a night of camping with a Bedouin guide. Although I would have been perfectly content to lie by the pool, my husband had convinced me that a dunes-filled desert tour was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, certainly one not to be missed by our children.



Shelley Emling

So off we went in our SUV on a four-hour journey from Salalah into the abyss, a ride that started on a smooth highway and ended on a trackless desert sandscape that rapidly alternated between ascending and descending. On the way, our guide took great delight in pointing out every gnarled frankincense tree we came across - and we came across a lot. Oman takes enormous pride in its frankincense, and the scent of the tree's resin is ubiquitous in homes, shops and hotels throughout the country. After coming to grips with the reality that fine grains of sand were going to get everywhere, I had to admit that there was something spectacular about watching the sunset in a sand dune swath covering 250,000 square miles of southern Arabia.

As we lay on our raised cots that night, out in the open, under a sky blazing with stars made me forget the white mice and black beetles scurrying across the sand. Indeed, after an alfresco dinner of camel meat, chicken, rice and garlic-touched fresh vegetables cooked by a handful of Bedouin men, the Arabian night cast a spell over me. And so did the rest of the holiday, filled with camels, beachcombing, world-class scuba diving and meals of mouth-watering tuna steaks and hummus.

Oman was an isolated, inward-looking nation until the 1970s, when the current leader, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, embarked on a lightning-fast investment and rebuilding scheme designed to bring the country into the 20th century. Today, Oman is a peaceful country that hasn't been afflicted with the same kind of turmoil so prevalent in other parts of the Middle East. Forty years ago, there were only six miles of paved road in this Kansas-sized country. Today there are thousands of miles of freeways, as well as road signs in English as well as Arabic. There also are some top-notch luxury hotels and restaurants.

In Muscat, we stayed at the massive Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort, which boasts three hotels encompassing 638 rooms and nearly 20 different restaurants. Although parts of the country are strangely Western - there's a Dairy Queen in the Muscat airport - this is still very much a Middle Eastern country, one that perfectly blends old and new.



Away from the hotels, many women still cover themselves in long black robes. And men still wear the long, flowing tunics known as dishdashas, as well as the intricately embroidered skull cap called a kumma. Besides Oman's vast desert and plush hotels, why would one make the seven-hour plane ride from London - or a much longer journey from Texas?

One major draw is the largely untouched 1,000 miles of coastline. In Oman, you can still find wide stretches of gorgeous sand, overrun with shells but with not a single sunbather. Another attraction is Muscat itself, with its mosques, palaces, and historic harbor district dominated by a pair of 16th-century fortresses, Mirani and Jalali. One afternoon we visited the city's colorful Muttrah souk and enjoyed getting lost in the winding alleyways that pass stalls hawking spices, crafts, scarves, silverware, and other souvenirs, all under a canopied roof of palm fronds.

From our Shangri-La hotel just outside Muscat, we also were able to arrange half-day snorkeling journeys on which the children were able to swim alongside huge sea turtles. There are more than 100 dive sites around Muscat alone, and even non-divers can enjoy close encounters with fish, turtles, dolphins, and whale sharks. But even better were the beaches around Salalah, a 90-minute plane ride from Muscat. Here we stayed at the lovely Crowne Plaza Hotel surrounded by some of the most pristine coastline in the world, a coastline that is especially alluring during the months of October through April.

What we liked best about Oman was that there are no glass skyscrapers of 21st century commerce to mar the skyline as there are in Dubai, Oman's flashy tourist-filled neighbor. There are simply jagged bluffs, old-fashioned food markets, hospitable people, and camels and goats grazing by the sides of roads. We left the country armed with Christmas presents for friends, as well as hopes that Oman will retain its traditional, low-key flavor. We also arrived home with sand still in our suitcases. But after such a great vacation, who cares?

Head of Corporate Communications and Media of Oman Air notified that Shelley Emling, a native of Dallas, began her reporting career with UPI in New Orleans. Emling joined Cox in 1992 and later, she became the first Cox Newspapers New York correspondent. For the past several years in London, she has been a journalist for Cox and also writes for The New York Times, USA TODAY, Fortune magazine, and the International Herald Tribune, both in print and online.

Al Haremi further highlighted that The Cox Newspapers Washington Bureau was founded in 1974. It serves the 17 daily Cox newspapers and 26 non-daily newspapers and shoppers from Washington, domestic bureaus in New York and on the West Coast, as well as foreign bureaus in Beijing, London, Mexico City, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. Stories written by Cox correspondents are distributed via The New York Times News service to roughly 650 additional newspapers worldwide with a combined daily circulation of about 35 million. Over the years, Cox Newspapers correspondents he said, have won, or shared in virtually every major American journalism award, including the Pulitzer Prize.

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