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## **Oman An Example Of A Safe Destination To Visit Condé Nast Traveler corrects American tourists' concepts toward the Middle East.**

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Usama Bin Karim Al Haremi, Head of Corporate Communications and Media of Oman Air notified that, the prestigious and most respected widely read American travel publication armed with the slogan "truth in travel" Condé Nast Traveller, also considered one of the most influential travel and destination guides worldwide, has released in its website [conciierge.com](http://conciierge.com), the report titled "The Middle East: Traveling outside the Comfort Zone" - May 2008, where he highlighted scripts of the report.

The publication stated, though virtually ignored as a destination by Americans, the Middle East is a trove of culture, history, and natural beauty. From the ancient forts and empty beaches of Oman to the old-world lure of Yemen, our foreign correspondents report on the best places to visit - and steer clear of - in one of the last corners of the world we have left to discover. They added, Americans tend to collapse the Middle East into one scary box. In reality, it consists of more than 20 countries, and the biggest danger they share is misunderstanding. A recent Condé Nast Traveler poll revealed that fewer than three percent of readers—among the most well-traveled U.S. citizens—have been to the Middle East in the past year, a statistic that has hardly changed over the past four years. To help you feel more secure in this unpredictable corner of the globe they added, we've asked our foreign correspondents to come up with firsthand guides to places with sophisticated cultures, wild landscapes, fine restaurants and hotels.

Al Haremi added that Susan Hack, a Condé Nast Traveler contributing editor based in Cairo said, when I think of the Middle East, mainly I feel thankful, for it's here that I've experienced some of the

great pleasures of my life. We learned the extent of Middle Eastern hospitality when two teenage boys from our village, who knew we were American, spotted us and raced selflessly to our aid. Oman was listed by the writer being an example of a safe destination to visit.

The writer said, the country's beaches and cultural sites are free of tourist crowds. But see them now, because Oman is on the verge of discovery.

A former maritime empire that stretched from India to Zanzibar, Oman is an anomaly, both in its own backyard and in the larger Middle East region. The yin to neighboring Dubai's hyped-up skyscraper yang, it offers travelers a combination of sophisticated Arabian heritage and unspoiled natural landscape that includes mountains, sand dunes, beaches, and world-class dive sites. Oman has embraced modernization, in the form of schools, roads, hospitals, and a strong military. It has luxury hotels and shopping malls, and now there are plans for two new resort cities. But the 68-year-old British-educated Sultan Qaboos, an absolute but popular ruler." He restricts building height to just nine stories and requires observation of Islamic architectural themes. Practically every building in Oman is white or an approved pastel color and their air conditioners have covers with Islamic motifs. Three decades ago, he was also the first Arab ruler to create a ministry of the environment.

Oman has caves, meteorite fields, and more than 500 forts and castles; the wonder is why it has so few visitors. "It's the best place we've been to," said Bob Raywood, a native of Cumbria, England, while visiting the capital's Sultan Qaboos Mosque on a five-day Oman tour planned in conjunction with stops in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. "We're walking around Muscat without a guide and feel perfectly safe. There are good hotels, but you also have the history. And the contrast of sea and mountains is just fantastic."

The biggest problem, travelers and officials agree, is not security but finding accommodations. The Arab world's cleanest and most scenic capital, where white houses nestle into mountain-backed blue bays, Muscat could easily become the Arabian Cabo San Lucas, yet it has barely 2,000 hotel rooms. The best way to see the country is with a four-by-four and a tent," says Jakob Oberhauser, an Austrian mountain guide who spends each winter leading trekkers in Oman. "On a ten-day trek, the scenery will be completely different each day. This country has so much untapped potential."

#### The Draw:

A classic Muscat-based tour of northern Oman includes the forts of Nakhal and Al-Rustaq, the fort and Friday souk at Nizwa, and a mountain trek to a green plateau of pomegranate, apricot, and walnut plantations at Jebel Akhdar, or a hike along Jebel Shams, a 10,000-foot-high ridge overlooking the Grand Canyon-like Wadi Ghul. The coastal route southeast of Muscat to the dhow-building port of Sur runs along spectacular beaches and water-cut courses, such as Wadi Tiwi, that lead back from the gulf to villages clinging to mountainsides. Oasis towns with sublime vistas and vernacular. Camp overnight at least once, immerses yourself in the dunes cape of the Wahiba Sands, or on one of the beaches near Ras al-Hadd, a sea-turtle nesting sanctuary. Isolated from the rest of the country by the United Arab Emirates, Oman's Musandam Peninsula is a 1,200-square-mile rock spine guarding the strategic Strait of Hormuz. The main town of Khasab, a 12-hour drive from Muscat but just 2 hours by car from Dubai, is the base for overnight dhow trips and snorkeling tours in fjords teeming with dolphins. On its own private bay, the brand-new Six Senses Hideaway at Zighy Bay has 82 villas and a spa. On another private bay just east of Muscat, Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort consists of three Arabian palace-style hotels, of which Al Husn has the most luxurious suites and the best beach. The Chedi Muscat, the chicest of the hotels along the capital's Al Qurum beach strip. Al Bustan Palace has its own beach and will reopen in September after a year's. The Oman Dive Center, a small complex on a private bay next to Barr Al Jissah, has simple rooms, a pool for PADI certification courses, and a pleasant bohemian. The Jebel Akhdar Hotel is the only place to stay in the mountains.

### Ease of Travel:

Most visitors arrive from Dubai, a 45-minute flight or four-hour drive from Muscat. The well-marked network of roads makes it easy to tour in a rented car, while scheduled flights on Oman Air provide links between Muscat and Khasab as well as Salalah, the capital of Dhofar Province. The famous fortresses and castles can be done solo, but for trips requiring overnights outside Muscat, it's worth the expense of hiring a driver and guide (ask your hotel concierge for referrals), especially if you want to visit the Wahiba Sands, the Empty Quarter, or the heights of Jebel Akhdar and Jebel Shams, which require off-road permits.

### No-Go Zones:



The main danger is over enthusiasm. Oman has no minefields like those in parts of Egypt's western desert, or tribes who hold foreigners for ransom, as its neighbor Yemen does. But you can easily get stuck in the sand even in a four-by-four, the rental car of choice. Bring a GPS-enabled cell phone, and always make sure your vehicle carries drinking water. It's best to avoid the Saudi and Yemeni border areas, mainly because of their remoteness.

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