

Bear Travels Oman



Our guide Angela leads us down a mountain road.

Yes, of course there were camels.

“Why Oman?”

That’s what I hear from practically everyone to whom I mention my most recent bike trip with Edelweiss Bike Tours. When I ask “why not?” I get a range of answers involving remoteness, strict Muslim laws, lack of tourist facilities and... just why?

The answers are very simple. First, it’s not overrun with tourists. Second, it’s very beautiful. Third, it has amazing roads - some, the tarred ones, amazingly good and some, the gravel ones, amazingly enjoyable. Fourth, and this one is a bottler, it’s only 14 and a half hours away, at least if you start in Dubai which is what Edelweiss does. For Australians that cuts out the extra five hours to get to Europe.

Seven of the nine bikes on this trip were variations on the BMW R nineT GS, with only Angela, the guide, and I on Yamaha Ténéré 700s. The Yamaha proved to be just right on those gravel roads, even if it did lack a little power on the six-lane highways that criss-cross both the UAE and Oman.

We had a bit of a transport stage on the first day, but the fun really started when we turned off towards Jebel Jais. This is one of a kind of road that makes me think that traffic planning jobs in Arabia are reserved for serious petrol heads. Oh, sure there are lots of those flat, straight roads. But all those roundabouts do provide curves, and whenever there is anything even vaguely interesting atop a mountain - or something can be built there - someone has immediately designed a brilliant riding road. The attraction on top of Jebel Jais, by the way, is the world’s longest and highest zip line. Pity the weather was bad.

Our accommodation that night was in the first of a line of five-star international hotels. There’s not much choice because tourism infrastructure does lack a lot of good local ones.

The next day began to show us what makes Oman such a spectacular destination. You didn’t know that, did you? I certainly didn’t, I was taking a punt - but today justified it. After a run down the coast, we turn right at Al-Khaburah. We are now headed for the foothills of Oman’s mountainous spine. For the rest of the day, until we reach the web of motorways around Muscat, we play on good, tarred roads with remarkably well-surveyed curves. Ideal motorcycling.

This is a remarkably young landscape with a variety of often torturously twisted geological layers and frequent intrusions of aggregate which is being eroded again after clearly being laid

down fairly recently. I’m not a geologist, but I know spectacular mountains when I see them - even when they’re only 1000 metres high. The tallest mountain in the 700-kilometre-long Al Hajar range, Jebel Shams, tops out at all of 3000 metres but Oman’s scenery makes the most of the elevation it has.

Muscat is kind of nice but the historical part is quite small and unimpressive. After Muscat, it was pretty much motorcycle paradise, leavened with unique stops like a look at the impressive boatyard of possibly the last dhow builder in the world, a turtle reserve where the stars of the show were (sadly) having a break on the night of our visit, and the 1000 metre limestone walls of Wadi Gul, the world’s second deepest after the Grand Canyon. And riding, lots of riding on gravel and immaculate tar with carefully surveyed curves. The remaining days offered more like that, along with an overnight stay in the desert and, on our way back to Dubai, an overnight stay on top of Jebel Hafeet in the UAE. I once described the road up there as the best bike road in the world, and I still think that.

I’m happy to recommend a ride through Oman to anyone, and remember - it’s closer than most other bike destinations!

(The Bear took this tour at the invitation of Edelweiss Bike Tours, www.edelweissbike.com.)

J Peter “The Bear” Thoeming #675

The coast of Oman is heavily defended by ancient castles.

