

Traditional Souks in Yemen

Cultural tourism at its best

Sana'a - Khaled Ad-Dhababi

جانب من سوق بيع الخناجر - صنعاء.
The Daggers Souk - Sana'a.

Yemen is a tourists' paradise with numerous attractions including its unique architecture, diverse nature and souks dispersed everywhere changing and adapting to modern times yet preserving their unique Yemeni flavour. Within these souks, one discovers the kindness of Yemenis, their gentle nature, their multiple dialects, their customs and habits and their authentic popular inheritance.

Souks are everywhere: in every city and village on the plains and in the mountains, in the coastal towns and of course in the capital, Sana'a. The souks attract the attention of any visitor. There are weekly souks, daily souks and occasional souks which are held during certain seasons or to commemorate particular events. But they all give an insight into the daily life of the country with its deep historical roots. The names of these souks change according to the days and places where they are held and according to the goods on the market.

In Sana'a, there are approximately thirty specialized souks centered around souk el Melh (salt) which is on the same model as the specialized Arab-Islamic souks, such as the souk of fabrics, souk of cereals, souk of the smiths, souk of spices, souk of Yemeni



pearls, souk of the artisans, souk of vegetables and souk of dry grapes. The market is a town within a city, a unique vibrant town in the old city where the unhurried pace of life and the enjoyment of simple pleasures is a joy to behold.

In the town of Ta'izz, and the surrounding region there are several souks which are a major tourist attraction. The main souk is Ashanini souk, which is smaller than that of Sana'a. It is the place for fabrics and silver jewels and the prices are lot cheaper than in the capital Daggers, swords, pottery and

perfumes are a real bargain.

If one goes to the south of the Sabre Mountain where villages are surrounded by green fields the virgin nature in the Valley of Ad-Dhabab, 8 km approximately out of Ta'izz, is breath-taking. From the early morning until midday you can find souk Ad-Dhabab in its beautiful, natural setting. The area is like another world where souks offer a splendid variety of local products at low prices.

In another zone, there is the cattle souk. Also on sale are sheep, goats and camels. Ta'izz has also other souks, such as souk Nashma, souk Hajdat and souk Mowzia.

Lahj province is also strewn with souks, such as the souk of the town of Al-Houta which is held each Monday and Thursday, Karash souk, souk Al-Maflahi and Sabt (Saturday) souk which all reflect the way of life of this unique Hadrami province.

Yemen's souks are one of its wonders. Their variety allows the visitor to discover the people and their culture through the country's markets. For the locals they are the places where anything and everything is discussed and where foreigners are treated as guests – a cup of tea is always on offer. So if you want to make friends with the locals take your time. It's not just a matter of bargain hunting. You will gain a penetrating flash of insight into the character of the Yemeni people and their way of life. ■