

Nizwa

Tourism in the Omani Heritage



منظر لمدينة نزوى من القلعة
A View of Nizwa from the Fort

UNESCO Lists Bahla' Fort as one of the oldest places of Heritage in the World

Nizwa is a town whose history and landmarks represent an original and deeply rooted aspect of traditional Omani heritage. It is one of the most magnificent of places in the Sultanate of Oman. The main town in the area al-Juhf, it comprises a part of the Jabal al-Akhdar (lit. Green Mountain) and is bound by the Dhahiriya region to the west and Sharqiya to the east. The district of al-Juhf has four main valleys: Andam, Halfiyin, Bahla' and Sama'il. Halfiyin and Sama'il together form a natural break in the western Hajar mountain range

by: **Dr Raouf al-Ansari**

which provide the traditional route between the coast and the interior. Nizwa is 200 km from Muscat and one's journey will begin by car on a motorway, ending with ease up in the mountains. On the way, the traveller will enjoy breathtaking mountain views, with peaks of purple one after another penetrating the green hills. The district used to be rich in copper deposits. Mijan (the classical name for Oman) copper was well known by the Sumerians of Mesopotamia and has been abundantly recorded in historical books.



بحيرة جوفية بكهف خاف حوتي مليئة
بأسماك نادرة لا أعين لها
Underground Lake in Hoti Cave

Historical Profile

Nizwa's history goes back to the 6th and 7th Centuries. One of the first towns to receive Muslim emissaries, the Julanda rulers accepted the Islamic faith and spread the teachings further. Nizwa continued to be the seat of the Imams, or religious leaders, until the Julanda drove the invading Persians out. For years, Nizwa was part of the prosperous route of the copper and frankincense trades. Ibn Batuta, the celebrated Arabian traveller, visited the town in the 14th Century and six hundred years later, the Englishman, Wilfred Thesiger, attempted to enter it but was forced to stay away because of ongoing skirmishes at the time.

Archaeological and Structural Landmarks

The fort at Nizwa, with its relatively new mosque, is perhaps the most remarkable structural landmark in the town.

Nizwa Fort

The fort, a foremost heritage site and landmark, is a sample of the military architecture of its time. Built in the middle of the 17th Century by the first Imam of the al-Ya'rubi dynasty, Imam Sultan bin Saeed ➤



الأزياء التقليدية العمانية
Omani Traditional Costumes

The new market at Nizwa has all the facilities one would expect. Here one can also find many different types of goods, from fresh produce to handicrafts and souvenirs. During the harvesting season, the business of buying and selling really flourishes. The market also represents a place for exchanging dates and date palms are visible from the fort and surround the town.

al-Ya'rubi, it remained the seat of both spiritual and temporal power of Oman until the second half of the last century.

Within the fort could be found provision for practically everything – government, the dispensation of justice, and even a prison. Its towers were fully equipped with guns and if the enemy should escape he would have to contemplate not only a deadly volley from the direction of the ramparts but a surprise deluge of hot oil that was kept at the ready in large cauldrons.

As one walks through the fort and climbs up to its highest point, Ibn Batuta's own description of Nizwa and its people come to mind: "*They are a bold and brave race and the tribes are perpetually at war with each other*".

The main part of the fort rises 24 metres above ground and has a cylindrical tower with an external diameter of nearly 43 metres, with an internal diameter of nearly 39 metres. Mud was used to build the fort to a height of 14 metres, with sunken dungeons below ground and a sentry platform at the

top to locate and fire muskets at the enemy. There are also three main forts: Tanuf, in the village of Tanuf; Beit Saleet, in Nizwa; and al-Radeeda, which was built during the time of the al-Ya'rubi rulers.

The New Mosque and its blue Dome
This is one of the most impressive mosques in Nizwa. It is located near the fort and built in a modern Arab and Islamic style that is characterized by attractive symmetrical components, startling colours and a remarkable petite blue dome with a graceful minaret.

Other mosques in the town of Nizwa include Sa'al Mosque, al-Shwathna Mosque, al-Sharjah Mosque, al-'Ayn Mosque, and al-Shareej Mosque in Tanuf.

The Old Souq

The Nizwa Souq, with its narrow mews, is one of the oldest oriental markets in Oman. It houses many small shops and units, and the atmosphere is always heavy with the scent of dry lemons, all kinds of spices, and various

other materials that are used in Omani traditional medicine and herbal treatments.

The New Market

The new market at Nizwa has all the facilities one would expect. Here one can also find many different types of goods, from fresh produce to handicrafts and souvenirs. During the harvesting season, the business of buying and selling really flourishes. The market also represents a place for exchanging dates and date palms are visible from the fort and surround the town. Antique silver jewellery, such as the polished *khanjars* (daggers) and swords, as well as other souvenirs, are also available in the souqs.

Al-Aflaaj

Besides the archaeological and structural landmarks, there are marvellous tourist landmarks at the springs of al-Aflaaj and al-Uyun. The former are canals that carry water from the wells and springs in the upper part of the settlement to the lower reaches where there are plants and houses. The latter comprise more than 89 springs, including the long and broad Falaj Daris.

Archaeological and Tourist Sites

Nizwa is surrounded by many historical and other areas that the visitor simply cannot ignore. These include:

1 - Bahla' City

35 km west of Nizwa is the capital of the Sultanate of Oman during the 12th and 17th Centuries. Bahla' is still proud of its ancient landmarks, in particular the wall that encompasses it from every side.

The fort here was built even before the establishment of Nizwa as a town. Some sources state that it was in fact the first fort built before the advent of Islam in the region. However, its renewal was certainly carried out during the middle ages. UNESCO has today duly listed Bahla' Fort as one of the oldest places of heritage in the world.

The market at Bahla' is located near the fort. The visitor can conveniently wander about and watch skilled craftsmen, such as blacksmiths and potters, producing the most exquisite souvenirs. Omani pottery is a main smithcraft in Oman and a factory has recently been set up as a part of efforts to promote and preserve these traditions. Bahla' was once a place for trading vegetable and ➤

other dyes, although these have now been replaced by modern chemical dyes.

2 - Faraq Village

This small village is located near the town of Nizwa and is in fact famous for its blue dyes. It is also the first village where Sultan bin Saeed stopped along his journey searching for allegiance to his rule of the interior. In the 18th Century, a fight took place here between the tribes of al-Ghafriyin and al-Nahaiyin.

3 - Tanuf Village

This village is 20 km from Nizwa on the way to Bahla' and is one of the oldest and

most attractive archaeological sites that will surely interest the visitor. One of the canals of al-Aflaj (referred to earlier) passes the village, which has become a centre for the production of pure waters after a commercial plant was built here in the vicinity of the Falaj Daris. This natural water is popularly known as Tanuf Water after the name of the village.

4 - Al-Rustaq City

This is today a modern town but was once the capital of the Albu Saediyn and al-Yarubi dynasties. It has a natural hot water spring next to a modern mosque that attracts

visitors and tourists. Another hot spring flows from a deep well, the walls of which were also built fairly recently. The water from this well flows across the al-Aflaj canals to the lower settlements where people use it especially for wudhu' (ablution).

Al-Kisra Fort is located in the centre of al-Rustaq next to the marketplace. It is believed that the Persians built the fort in the 7th Century when they were occupying Oman. Other annexes were later added during different periods, the current building owing its construction to the 18th Century.

Al-Rustaq Fort is characterized by many features that reflect Oman's history. It has ➤

الصناعات الشعبية - نزوى
Popular Crafts, Nizwa



At 10 km is another gravel road to the right leading to the houses – both old and new - in the village of Ghul. At the right-hand side cliff stands a new village of concrete villas and houses, whilst on the left of the cliff are the old deserted villages. The houses of the village of Ghul blend with the mountains and valleys like an idyllic painting.



Omai Traditional Silver Artifacts الصناعات الفضية التقليدية العمانية



Al-Hamra is one of the greatest examples of Omani village heritage. Located near Bahla', al-Hamra's old two-storey houses are arguably the most beautiful traditional houses in Oman. The village is famous for its extensive date palms and has an old souq almost hidden away amidst these old houses. Al-Hamra is particularly well known for the tasty Omani halwa (fudge), which requires many hours and acquired skill to prepare.

unique narrow pathways and rooms of different sizes. The ceilings of some of these rooms are a testament to the extent of technical advancement of the Omanis. Curiously, one of the canals of al-Aflaj quaintly penetrates the middle of the fort.

The Ministry of National Heritage and Culture in the Sultanate of Oman has recently renovated and renewed this great fort.

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6 - Hoti Cave

Located near the villages of Tanuf and al-Hamra, this is one of the largest and historically most important caves in Oman, as well as being one of the most mysterious.

It is 30 metres deep and the visitor can walk for half an hour inside it before ➤

مدينة نزوى: القلعة والمسجد
Nizwa Town, Fort and Mosque



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coming across an underground lake that is a sanctuary for a rare type of fish that have no eyes.

There are other caves too, but perhaps none as mysterious or as awe-inspiring as Hoti.

7 - Jabreen Fort

This is located 191 km from Muscat and is situated on the left side of the main road upon leaving the town of Bahla'. It was built in the 17th Century and differs from other forts in Oman because of its size and architectural design.

It is characterized by gypsum engravings, wooden decorations and impressive coloured ceilings. There is also an open courtyard in the middle that is overlooked by wooden balconies. The fort is composed of various levels joined with each other by stairs.

8 - Wadi Ghul

A gravel road turns off to Wadi Ghul from the al-Hamra road. It is a frequently traversed thoroughway with a wide gorge at Jabal Akhdar on the right and Jabal Ghul on the left.

Wadi Ghul is known as the home of some of the best traditional weavers in Oman. In this area the men weave on horizontal looms. The traditional patterns are geometric, made from red, black and brown vegetable and chemical dyes.

At 10 km is another gravel road to the right leading to the houses - both old and new - in the village of Ghul. At the right-hand side cliff stands a new village of concrete villas and houses, whilst on the left of the cliff are the old deserted villages. The houses of the village of Ghul blend with the mountains and valleys like an idyllic painting.

Old pots can still be seen in the abandoned houses of the old villages, along with ancient rock carvings depicting warriors with swords and shields.

9 - Jabal Shams, or "Mountain of the Sun"

Jabal Shams, the Mountain of the Sun, is the highest peak in Oman at 3,009 metres above sea level and can be reached by

driving to the end of Wadi Ghul. Here the gravel road climbs up through some spectacular scenery. At the peak, of course, it is much cooler than in the valley below even during the summer, a refreshing breather for any visitor.

Here, locals sell woven rugs made of goat's hair that are usually of exceptionally good quality and a major source of income for the people.

Nizwa Hotel

This is one of the main places for dwelling in Nizwa and its surrounding areas. It is located near the tourist landmarks of Jabreen, al-Hamra and Misfat and is a suitable place for excursions to other places of interest. The hotel was built as a traditional structure and contains all the amenities and services that are otherwise provided by high-class hotels.

Hotel telephone: 00 96 8 431 616 ■

