

Oman

Mosques: symbol of faith

By Aftab Husain Kola

Elegant mosques dot the landscape of Oman lending it a well-defined character of an Islamic ambience. Oman was one of the ear-liest territories to enter the fold of Islam during the life-time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

مسجد السلطان قابوس الكبير.

The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

The people of Oman were so moved by the spirit of Islam that they embraced the religion in no time at all. Mazin bin Ghadoubah takes the credit for becoming the first Omani convert. He was given the shahadah by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself in Madinah.

History records that on his return from Madinah, Mazin, who was inspired by the beauty of the prophet's masjid in Madinah, built a mosque in his hometown Samayil, which took the name 'Masjid Al Mudhmar'. It has been restored by the government. and is the first mosque of Oman.

From the first mosque till today the rulers of Oman have always demonstrated magnanimity when it comes to the construction of mosques to serve the devout inhabitants of the country. Oman's rich Islamic heritage is manifested in its old mosques and also in the modern elegant mosques which reflect the ruler's vision of keeping the country abreast with the times.

The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque is the result of His Majesty's vision which aims at making Oman a symbol of Islamic culture.

Coming under the Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture (under the Diwan of Royal Court) the mosque now stands as a crowning



glory on the architectural horizon of the country.

I had the honour of praying in this mosque on several occasions. But this time we ventured out to find out what makes it a marvellous piece of architecture.

The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, located in Ghubra in Bausher district, was built at His Majesty's personal expense. Designed by architects Mohammed Saleh Makiya and Quad Design (for London and Muscat) the mosque is a fine specimen of Islamic architecture.

Our guide Mohammed Al Khaifi told us that the site covers an area of 416,000sqm and the complex spans an area of around 40,000sqm.

We start from the main approach of the gigantic mosque complex, situated at the south end. Standing at the main entrance courtyard we can see the other two entrance passageways which lead to the podium.

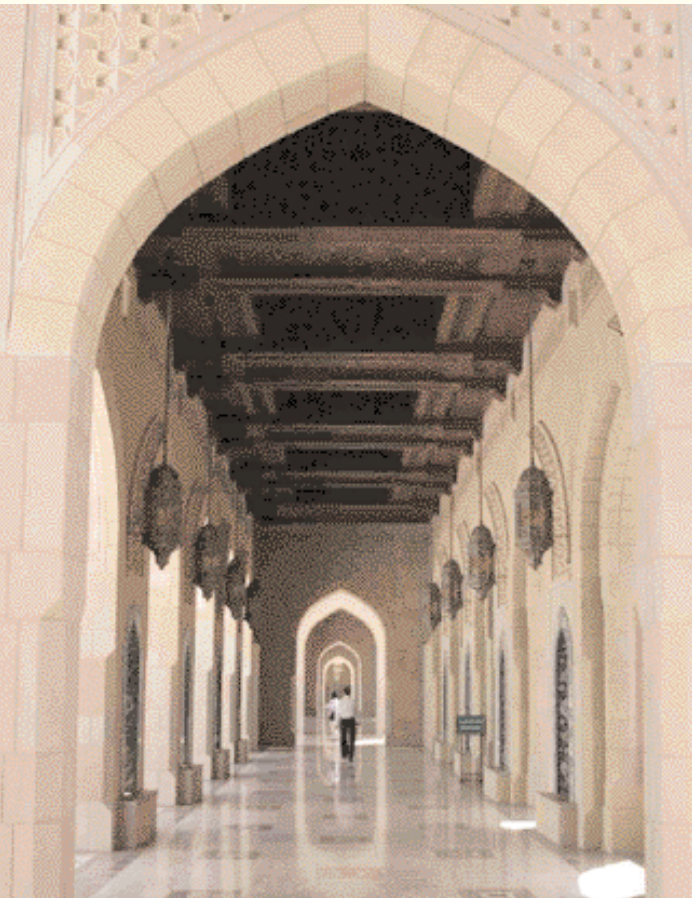
All the three passageways have exclusive designs incorporating different Islamic architectural features, including the Persian style. The ablution area is wedged between two passageways.

Behind these three pas-sageways are the entrance courtyard leading to the arcaded riwaqs. Through the ornate door our guide ushers us ➤



Al-Mihrab (the Niche).

المحراب.



The arcaded riwaq.

الرواق.



Al-Thuraia (The crystal chandeliers).

الثريا.

to the main square prayer hall with a central dome.

The massive hall with the exterior walls is entirely clad in off white Bianco P and dark grey Bardiglio marble panelling sheathed in cut tile work.

The arch framed mural panels are decorated with ceramic floral patterns. The mihrab (niche — where the imam leads the congregational prayers) projects through the outer qiblah wall — a traditional feature of the qiblah walls of Omani mosques.

Khaifi pointed out the beautifully carved upper walls of the hall which are girdled with a richly decorated band of Quranic verses in Thuluth script.

As we focused on the grandeur of the ceiling and the walls Khaifi told us to look down pointing to the carpet which spans the entire floor. Measuring 70 x 60 metres and weighing 21 tonnes the fine wool carpet took 600 weavers four years to complete.

The magnificent main chandelier dropping from the central dome is made of Swarovski crystal and gold plated metal work, like all other 34

chandeliers which hang along the wood paneled ceiling outer bays surrounding the dome. The main eight ton chandelier has 1,122 lamps.

We then moved to the ladies prayer hall which can accommodate 750 worshippers. The walls are clad in pink stone specifically polished and embellished in polychrome marble inlay panels.

The inner sahn gives a subtle feeling with a spartan cream interior that reflects a continuity of the exterior of the prayer enclave. A retractable canopy, a lightweight shading structure, was designed to be attached to the roof to cover the sky when shade is required in the courtyard.

A library with 20,000 books and an Islamic Information Centre are housed in the mosque complex. The library has geometric carvings while floral designs are used in the meeting hall. Facilities like computers, internet, photocopying, etc are made available in the library. There is a lecture hall which can accommodate around 300 people. Regular lectures on different topics are organised.

Information

Visiting times (Non-Muslims are permitted):
From Saturday to Wednesday: 8 am to 11 am.
Guides are available at the mosque. ■