TOUR CODE

GS5

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE ARAB GULF STATES

Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, the Musandam Peninsula & the UAE

19 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Kuwait*

Today we arrive in Kuwait City.

During the Iraqi invasion, Kuwait City was extensively bombed and damaged. Buildings were fired upon, set alight, and demolished; roads and bridge links were the targets of explosives, and landmarks were defaced. After the invasion's terrible onslaught, foreign investors and the Kuwaiti government are actively involved in modernizing the city and transforming it into a world-class, state-of-the-art business hub. Today, virtually all traces of the invasion have been cleared, and construction cranes dot the skyline.

Overnight in Kuwait City. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Kuwait City: City Tour*

Today we have a guided tour of Kuwait City.

We will begin with one of Kuwait's most famous landmarks, the Kuwait Towers. We will take a high speed elevator to the uppermost sphere of the largest tower (187 m / 600 ft) for a panoramic view from the revolving observation area.

We also visit the Tareq Rajab Museum, a private collection of the Rajab family. The museum deals with calligraphy, pottery, metalwork, glass, wood, ivory and jade carvings of the Islamic world. Early calligraphy is presented in a separate small room, showing pages from the Holy Qur'an, dating back to the first three centuries of the Islamic period. There are also displays of costumes, textiles, embroideries and jewelry of the Islamic world.

We also visit the National Memorial Museum, which encapsulates the Iraqi invasion and honours the sacrifices that ordinary Kuwaiti citizens, the Kuwaiti military and the allies made in order to beat back Sadam's forces. The exhibits comprise a set of well-crafted models of the city that are illuminated in time with an audio recording in English.

Overnight in Kuwait City. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Kuwait City, Kuwait - Doha, Qatar*

Today we fly to Doha. Depending on flight time, we may accomplish some sightseeing on arrival.

Doha is the capital of Qatar. It is a modern and rapidly developing city and, considering the money being poured into construction, Doha looks set to become one of the premier cities in the Gulf within a few years. Back in 1825, the city was founded under the name Al-Bidda. The name "Doha" came from the Arabic ad-daw?a, "the big tree." The reference might be to a prominent tree that stood at the site where the original fishing village arose, on the eastern coast of the Qatar peninsula. Or it might have been derived from "dohat" -- Arabic for bay or gulf -- referring to the Doha Bay area.

Overnight in Doha. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Qatar: Area Tour*

Ruled by the Al Thani family since the mid-1800s, Qatar transformed itself from a poor British protectorate noted mainly for coalescing into an independent state with significant oil and natural gas revenues. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Qatari economy was crippled by a continuous siphoning off of petroleum revenues by the amir, who had ruled the country since 1972. He was overthrown by his son, the current Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, in a bloodless coup in 1995. In 2001, Qatar resolved its longstanding border disputes with both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Today oil and natural gas revenues enable Qatar to have one of the highest per capita incomes in the world.

We visit the Sheikh Faisal Museum, the camel race track, and a panoramic city tour by bus. We also visit the Islamic Art Museum, one of the Gulf region's newest and most fabulous museums.
We will take a stroll along part of the sea-front Corniche where you will be struck by the expanding and rising urban skyline. This is a part of the city where dhows line the quay, and Palm Tree Island beckons from the centre of the bay.

Overnight in Doha. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Doha, Qatar - Sharjah, UAE - Dubai*

Today's Doha sightseeing will include the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club, where the rich emirs come from all over Middle East. We can walk around the stables, pet the horses, meet jockeys, see the horses training -- an interesting insight into how the rich spend their money.

We proceed to the wonderfully atmospheric Old Souk for a break for lunch and plenty of independent time. This is the most traditional of souks; it first started as a weekend market for local Bedu, selling meat, wool, milk and other staples. Today, this maze of alleyways covers a large area with separate sections selling traditional clothing, hardware, perfumes, spices, incense, and dried fruit. In the Gold Souk one discovers a packed row of jewelery shops selling both locally crafted and imported gold jewelery. We will also visit the private museum of Sheik Faisal Bin Qassim al Thani. Here we find an impressive collection of artifacts, weapons, Bedouin jewelery, traditional clothing and old photographs.

Later today we fly to Sharjah and continue the short distance to Dubai.

Overnight in Dubai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Dubai: City Tour*

Dubai is one of the most futuristic cities in the world, and a dynamic city-state at the heart of the UAE. Although it is not the largest of the emirates, Dubai is one of the wealthiest and most varied. World famous as a duty free shopping centre, it is on the basis of trade (not just oil) that Dubai has built its wealth.

Today we will tour Dubai city to observe the city's layout and modern architecture. This city has many fine mosques, and today we will stop at the elegant Jumeirah Mosque, a landmark of Dubai. This beautiful mosque is a spectacular example of modern Islamic architecture.

Another of our stops will be the Emirates Towers, two of the highest buildings in the Gulf and the most prestigious buildings on Dubai's skyline. One cannot miss the Burj Al Arab Hotel, built in the shape of a billowing Arabian dhow sail and dominating the Dubai coastline. This is one of the world 's most spectacular and incomparably luxurious hotels.

We'll also travel to the observation deck of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, for stupendous views.

Although an ultra-modern city in many respects, much of Dubai's heritage has been retained. We will visit the Dubai Museum, housed in the restored Fort Fahidi. Inside this mud-walled fort dating back to the early 19th Century, the displays chronicle the long history of the Arabian Gulf.

From the museum we will explore the 'Creek' area and see the old houses in the Bastakia quarter. A visit to this district is a step back in time to the days before electricity and air-conditioning, where wind towers cooled traditional courtyard houses. Many of the old wind tower houses were built by the wealthy merchants of the past, and Old Dubai was famous for these towers lining the Creek on both sides.

We end our day with a journey across the Creek by water taxi, known as an "abra". The abra is a wonderful vantage point from which to see the modern and old buildings sitting along the Creekside. On the other side of the Creek we will set out on foot to navigate through the bustling alleys towards the spice and gold souks.

NOTE: The order of Dubai area sightseeing may vary at the discretion of your Tour Leader depending on incoming flight times and other logistical considerations.

Overnight in Dubai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Dubai: Abu Dhabi & Time at Leisure*

Quite early this morning (to beat the traffic), we have a morning excursion to Abu Dhabi, largest of the emirates and its ultra-modern capital on the Arabian Gulf. Although Abu Dhabi city was founded in the late 18th century, the city exploded with oil wealth in the 1960s and the city was entirely rebuilt. There are almost no buildings in the city more than 30 years old. However, Abu Dhabi's citizens are very proud of their fabulously rich city with its broad avenues and futuristic buildings. The city's architecture is an intriguing interpretation of Islamic designs crafted in modern materials.

We will see the magnificent waterfront corniche and visit the whitewashed Al-Husn Palace, the oldest significant building in Abu Dhabi, and the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. The oil industry has turned this piece of desert into one of the worlds' most technically advanced cities. Abu Dhabi is situated among a group of islands and we will take a lunch (included today) cruise along the corniche to view the spectacular city skyline.

We return to Dubai later in the late afternoon.

A POPULAR OPTION today is dinner at one of the restaurants at the Burj al Arab Hotel; however, reservations must be made well in advance. Please review the hotel website (www.jumeirah.com) for the various restaurant options and contact them directly to book (due to the length of our day, you should reserve for no earlier than 8 pm).

Overnight in Dubai. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 8 *Dubai - Sharjah - Ras Al-Khaimah - Ajman, UAE - Khasab, Oman*

From Dubai we travel north by road to the third largest of the emirates, Sharjah. Spread out along the Khalid Lagoon, Sharjah is an old trading centre with a laid-back feel. Here we will see the King Faisal Mosque, the largest place of worship in the UAE, capable of holding up to 3,000 people in prayer. We also pass through Ajman, the UAE's smallest emirate, which boasts one of the most attractive waterfronts in the country with soft white sand and lofty date palms.

Travelling north we enter into the emirate of Ras Al-Khaimah, the agricultural centre of the UAE. The old town, built

around the harbour, is a charming place to wander. North of the town we visit an archaeological site that spreads out around the so-called "Queen of Sheba's Palace".

We cross the border into Oman (have your passports handy!) and travel via a panoramic coastal road overlooking the Gulf of Arabia and the Straits of Hormuz. Our destination is Khasab, local capital of the Governorate of Musandam, the "Norway of Arabia". The Musandam Peninsula is completely separated from the main body of Oman by a stretch of land belonging to the UAE. Musandam has developed distinct language dialects and cultural mores. A huge pale limestone massif with steep strata crossed cliffs descending into the sea, the peninsula has remained isolated from the rest of Arabia and is still very remote. The area is sparsely populated by the Shihuh tribe, who for centuries have been carving a precarious existence from the seas. Some villages can only be accessed by boat.

On arrival we have a city tour, including the restored Portuguese Fort of Khasab, a museum where many Omani handicrafts items are displayed. We will also pass by the prehistoric rock carvings depicting camels, ships and warriors in the neighbouring village of Qadah.

Overnight in Khasab. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Musandam Peninsula: Dhow Cruise*

Mountains dominate the Musandam landscape as they rise straight from the sea creating a fjord-like coastline (hence the Norway comparison) that is unique in the region. This coastal zone, along with many offshore islands and inlets, abound with wildlife, including seabirds, dolphins, and whales.

After boarding our traditional Omani dhow pier side, the cruise will take you toward Musandam's longest and most spectacular fjord, which is often referred to as 'Norway of the Arabia'; calm, turquoise waters contrast with the creamy white limestone cliffs. Along the way we will pass small fishing villages and perhaps even encounter dolphins. The dhow will anchor in the vicinity off Telegraph Island, allowing you to take a swim or just sit back and enjoy soft drinks, tea or coffee while admiring breathtaking views of mountains rising in the distance to over 2,000 feet. Our cruise continues with lunch provided on board. After the tour leisurely cruise back to Khasab.

Overnight in Khasab. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 10 *Khasab, Oman: Mountain Safari - Dubai, UAE*

This tour is by a 4-wheel drive vehicle (closed and air-conditioned). Driving is partially on winding mountain roads. We will be able to enjoy some of Oman's most stunning sceneries. We board our 4-wheel drive vehicle and get ready for an exciting and breathtaking trip to Jebel Harim (translated as the Mountain of Women). With a height of 6,260 feet it is the highest peak on the Musandam Peninsula. During your journey to Jebel Harim, you will be able to enjoy incredible vistas, including terraced mountain villages, lush Acacia forests and wadis (dry river beds). Following a drive of a little over an hour, a stop will be made at a Bedouin village located at an elevation of 3,000 feet. The village of Sayah, surrounded by palm groves, is one of the most picturesque villages on the Musandam Peninsula. After a stop for photographs and to enjoy this idyllic setting, continue with your drive to Jebel Harim. There will be time to admire the grand panorama from the mountain's summit. The return drive takes us past Khawr Najid, a stunning sea viewpoint overlooking the Indian Ocean. We stop at Al Khalidya Nature Park before concluding our adventure back at Khasab.

Later this afternoon we return by road to Dubai.

Overnight in Dubai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Dubai - Fujairah, UAE - Sohar, Oman*

Today we leave Dubai and travel east towards the only one of the United Arab Emirates not located on the Arabian Gulf, Fujairah.

At first we cross the flat desert but the scenery becomes wilder as we rise into the foothills of the Hajar Mountains through steep mountain gorges and wadis. Politically, this is a very obscure region -- there are several small territorial enclaves isolated deep within the boundaries of other emirates. We drive through the hills and down to the coast of the Gulf of Oman to the town of Dibba; the scenery on this drive is spectacular, with jagged mountains coming down to deserted white beaches lapped by the bluest of azure seas. At the town of Badiyah we will see the oldest mosque in the UAE. Before visiting the relaxed modern town of Fujairah we will stop at the old town. The original town of Fujairah was abandoned early in the 20th century and has been restored. Here we will visit the small museum before continuing to the border with Oman.

From Fujairah we head south to the Omani border. Here we enter a different world from the UAE. Oman is not principally a land of sand deserts but rather a dramatic area of dry, jagged mountains with narrow river valleys (wadis) between. The evidence of Oman's tribal past is everywhere, with ruined forts commanding every important vantage point. Much of Oman remains hidden in remote valleys and there is a feeling of self-imposed isolation here at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

The first major settlement we come to in Oman is the fishing village of Sohar. This town was once much bigger, being the centre of an empire stretching from India to Africa. This was where the legendary Sinbad the Sailor set out on his voyages. Today Sohar is a sleepy shadow of its former glory.

Overnight in Sohar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Sohar - Muscat*

Today we travel by road to Muscat. Our route takes us through the extensive plain of the Batinah, which runs between the sea and the mountains for 270 km (167 miles) from the frontier with the UAE southeast to Muscat. Its width varies, averaging about 25 km (15.5 miles) and it is one of the most densely inhabited regions of Oman. This is not saying much, however, since Oman only has a population of 3 million living in a country of over 300,000 sq km (117,000 sq miles). Most of the people live in or around Muscat, the capital. The cultivation in the Batinah, and hence the villages, is concentrated in a narrow strip along the coast where about half of the cultivated land in all of Oman is located. The palm groves are densely green sheltering limes, bananas, pomegranates, figs, papaya, mangoes, guavas and vegetables. Fishing is also very important in this area.

As we approach Muscat the agricultural plain narrows with the mountains closing in on the coast. Muscat is not actually one town, but rather three separate towns plus several associated towns all separated by geographical features of the mountainous, indented coast. Time permitting, we may accomplish some of our Muscat sightseeing upon arrival.

Overnight in Muscat. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Muscat: Area Tour*

Oman's position on the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean, and its isolation from the rest of Arabia have given the country a much more outward orientation. Trade from Oman to India and Africa has been conducted for thousands of years. During the age of the European empires in India and Africa, Oman developed strong ties to Britain. Sharing the

mountainous south coast of the Arabian Peninsula with Yemen, Oman shares many features with its western neighbour, including aspects of their dress and architecture. In ancient times this area was where highly prized Frankincense was grown and exported.

Today our sightseeing includes the Sultan Qaboos Great Mosque. Next is the Baranda Museum, a new facility with interesting displays about the history of Muscat and Oman. After a lunch break we'll visit the Old Palace Area (from the outside), the Bayt al-Zubair Museum, a wonderful museum occupying a traditional house with displays of weaponry, jewelry, costumes, household items and old photos.

Later we visit the Sidab Women's Sewing Group (SWSG), a non-profit community organization inspired and run by local women. The group helps women from a fishing village develop sewing skills so that they can create handicrafts which earn them an income.

Overnight in Muscat. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Muscat - Qariyat - Sur*

Today we depart Muscat by road to the Bimmah Sinkhole via the town of Qariyat and the ruins of Bibi Mariam's Tomb. The sinkhole is a giant depression where sea water has merged with fresh. Two flights of steps take you down to a dazzling pool of blue and green water. After a lunch break at the sinkhole, we continue past Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi. This is a region where we can savour the atmosphere of traditional Oman, as it was before the days of oil. Towns here prospered centuries ago on the trade with Africa and Zanzibar coming through the Omani port of Sur. Fine houses and forts were built and many of them still stand today, set back from the road behind the modern buildings. Most of the desert area of Oman is a flat gravel plain but the Wahiba has huge ridges of orange sand dunes separated by valleys. The few Bedouin who still live here breed fine camels.

After check-in at the Sur hotel, we embark on a sightseeing programme that includes the old boat harbour and the Ghanja, a large "dhow" that is on display out of the water. We then go for a short boat ride around the harbour, having a look at the boat builders' town of Aijah from the sea.

Sur's maritime history is always of particular interest. Sur was an important port in ancient times, but really came into its own when Oman started to trade extensively with East Africa. Merchants here made fortunes from the trade in slaves and cloves, and used the profits to build elaborate houses. We will learn of Sur's history and its role in shipbuilding. Sur has one of the few existing boat-building yards where traditional wooden Arab dhows are still made. These fine sailing ships carried Arab merchants far across the seas to Africa, India and South East Asia. These trading missions were responsible for spreading the Islamic religion to countries as far away as Malaysia and Indonesia.

Overnight in Sur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Sur - Nizwa*

This morning we leave Sur and stop near the Badiyah Sands where some Bedouin people live. We also stop at Manah to see the ruined old town.

We continue to Nizwa, the main town of the interior province. Upon arrival we will visit Nizwah Fort, built in the mid 17th century. For 300 years this was the seat of conservative Islamic rule by the Imam who was both the head of state and religious leader. We will also explore the Nizwa souk (market), where we may be able see jewelery being made. Oman has always had a strong tradition of intricate silverwork, especially in the making of daggers. This curved dagger is worn on a man's belt, and is an important symbol of manhood and wealth. Still today the Omani men proudly wear

the intricately worked Khanjar over their traditional robes.

At some point during our time in Nizwah, we will also visit the central market. Nizwa is the economic and commercial centre of the province and famous for its gold and silver handicrafts.

Overnight in Nizwa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Nizwa: Area Tour*

Today we will visit the town of Bahla, which frequently was the capital of Oman, especially between the 12th and early 17th centuries. Bahla has still retained its old town walls, and mud brick buildings and palm groves fill the enclosed area. The oasis of Bahla owes its prosperity to the Banu Nebhan, the dominant tribe in the area from the 12th to the end of the 15th century. The ruins of the immense fort, with its walls and towers of unbaked brick and its stone foundations, is a remarkable example of this type of fortification and attests to the power of the Banu Nebhan. Today the Bahla Fort is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In nearby Jabrin we will see Jabrin Fort, built by Imam Bil'Arab bin Sultan al Ya'arubi in 1670 as a defensive stronghold and as living accommodation for the Imam. It has two huge towers with walls two metres thick, and is one of the most impressive forts in the Sultanate. The tomb of Imam Bil'arab remains within the fort.

During our stay in this little visited part of Oman, we will take our four-wheel drive vehicles up into the mountains, north of the Jebel Akhdar, to witness rural life. We will see the village of Saya, a farming nirvana with opulent groves of fruit trees, vine, and wild juniper. Here terraced farms cling to the mountainside. The villages of Al Ain and Shirayja overlook groves of fruit trees and provide for great photo opportunities.

Overnight in Nizwa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Nizwa - Salalah*

Today we drive back to Muscat and then fly to Salalah, the second largest town in Oman.

Further into the mountains we will visit the imposing fort at Al-Rostaq, a large building containing many sections including a prison and an Islamic teaching school. Again, the fort has an advanced water supply making it a self-contained bastion in the high mountains. Leaving the fort we have time to explore the small town of Al-Rostaq and observe the traditional dress and ways of the mountain people.

Salalah is isolated far in the south east of the country, close to the Yemeni border. The setting here is magnificent, as Salalah faces the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean, and is backed by hills.

Overnight in Salalah. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Salalah Area*

This morning, before heading along the coast and into the mountains in our four-wheel drives, we tour Salalah including the museum and the archaeological site of Al-Balid. In pre-Christian times this tiny area was one of the three centres of production for one of the ancient world's most highly prized and expensive commodities, Frankincense. This was the main area in which the Frankincense tree grew. Demand for this rare product was enormous in the Mediterranean region as it was burnt in huge quantities during religious rites in temples throughout the Roman world. (Frankincense is

a gum dried from the sap of a special tree that only grows in this area).

We also visit the site of Sumhuram, the port at the beginning of the Incense Route. We finish at the traditional boatbuilding village of Taqua, the "Queen of Sheba's Palace," and the oasis springs of Ain Arsat and Ain Hamra. You'll have a chance to shop for Frankincense at the market in Salalah.

Overnight in Salalah. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Salalah - Muscat - Depart*

Today we fly back to Muscat and connect with our flights homeward (departure usually after midnight, just into tomorrow).

LAND ONLY PASSENGERS MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE AFTERNOON / EVENING FLIGHT FROM SALALAH WHEN BOOKING AIR FROM MUSCAT. IF YOUR FLIGHT DEPARTS MUSCAT EARLIER THAN 22:00 TONIGHT YOU WILL NEED TO OVERNIGHT IN MUSCAT AT AN ADDITIONAL COST. IF YOUR FLIGHT DEPARTS MUSCAT JUST AFTER MIDNIGHT, MAKE SURE THAT THE DEPARTURE IS FOR TOMORROW'S DATE.

BON VOYAGE ! Meal plan: Breakfast.