



Souvenirs of OMAN

**AN INSIGHT
INTO THE
CULTURAL
HERITAGE OF
THE JEWEL OF
ARABIA**

**With five
MAPS of the
main souks**



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CULTURAL HERITAGE
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From an original idea of Michela Poles and Hassan Al Daghari

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To request permissions, contact the author, Michela Poles,
at info@souvenirsofoman.com

Ebook download: PDF

Arabic language and content revision: Hassan Al Daghari

Edited by: Michela Poles, Maddie Dardengo

Layout, graphics and maps: Michela Poles

Photos by: Michela Poles, unless stated otherwise

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*To the beautiful
people of Oman*



Preface

I was offered a job in tourism and first arrived in Oman in 2014. I accepted the opportunity out of curiosity, but I knew very little about the country at the time. I landed in Muscat with no expectations and had planned to stay no longer than one year. To my surprise, this peaceful land was so much more than I had imagined. As a result, I am still living her and loving my job and this country more and more every day.

"A land of contrasts," they call it, and that is what captured me first. The first illustration of Oman's tremendous diversity is the sheer beauty of its topography, which can change dramatically in only 30 km: mountains, fjords, deserts, lagoons, wadis, beaches, and plains. The people of the nation are likewise diverse, consisting of a multifaceted, distinctive, and rich fusion of various ethnic groups, tribes, languages, and traditions.

One of the most unique aspects of Oman is the cohabitation of the past and the present. A very modern lifestyle with all its comforts exists in perfect balance with a vibrant past that is still very much alive.

The heart of this country lies in its past. It throbs in the traditional markets and ceremonies, in the regional clothes worn with pride, and in the expert hands of the artisans who craft beautiful objects. Such handicrafts, which we often buy as souvenirs, convey the stories of many tribes and generations. Through the conservation of Oman's crafts heritage, the identity of the country is strengthened and preserved.

Travellers are fascinated by Omani heritage. They love learning about the specifics and local names of what they see. However, when it comes to the difficult Arabic names of items and their purposes, the explanations and names often get mixed up or are hard for them to remember. It's understandable, given how difficult it is to recall so many new things, pieces of information, and unfamiliar terms.

Thus, after noticing this type of necessity for organising information and names to better retain them, this guidebook

Omani dagger (khanjar), Nizwani type.

was born. It really started as a collection of maps meant to be a support tool to guide group tours more efficiently. That concept eventually evolved into this book, which may be used as a tool to learn and explore before or during a trip to Oman, as well as a reference once home to organise images or recollections.

The book is a shopping guide with notes on culture and traditions. My knowledge of Omani culture and traditions comes from constant study and regular contact with Omani people. I am particularly close to one family of mostly women, who have now become my "Omani family." I have lived with them for an extended period of time, during which I have learned a lot firsthand. Furthermore, the Omani colleagues' responses to my incessant inquiries regarding regional habits and traditions helped me gain a deeper grasp of the Omani mentality. My shopping knowledge comes, first of all, from being an avid buyer of Omani products. Such knowledge has deepened through many years of experience. Constant questions and requests from my guests have been a push to research and learn more.

Through this book, I wish to thank all my Omani friends for being the kindest and most welcoming people. I thank them for treating me like one of their own and for having shown me countless times what I have grown to love and treasure in Omani people: simplicity, dignity, kindness, and a zest for life with a hint of humour. The spirit of Omanis infuses and enhances the beauty of this country, making it one of the safest places in the world.

May a little bit of my love for this land get to you through this book. I hope it will be useful, whether you are visiting Oman for the first or second time or just going over your memories if you have already been to the Sultanate.

A souvenir can be much more than just another collectible object to throw in a box or place in a display cabinet. It is most often through that special something we bring back from our travels that our recollection ignites, even after years.

Souvenirs are a way to keep the journey going, just in another form.


Omani dagger (khanjar), Sa'idi type.



Introduction


This guidebook is intended to blend practical advice on shopping with relevant references to Oman's culture and folklore. It is designed to help you transform the mundane task of looking for souvenirs into a trip within a trip, a small chapter of discovery that will ultimately allow you to better understand the culture and everyday life of the people of Oman.


The book features the main local items and products, with a focus on the "Omani character" of those items. Most of them belong to the Omani heritage, but there are also a few that have been assimilated into the culture, despite not being Omani by origin (like *chai karak*, for example, a spiced milk tea that has become the second most famous "national drink" after Omani coffee). Additionally, there are items that can be considered Omani by "inspiration" (like locally manufactured perfumes). Alongside cultural remarks, in this book you will find useful information about local habits and uses, places to purchase, prices, and insider tips. For the sake of convenience, the practical information has been organised into small subsections highlighted through icons, which make it easier to quickly find the part that interests you the most about the item.

 A *khanjar* (the iconic traditional Omani dagger) guides you through the traditional uses of a specific item.


DISCLAIMER


Among "traditional uses," the medical benefits of local natural medicine are frequently mentioned. These are NOT intended as medical advice. Please check with your doctor before adopting any of the local treatments if you have any concerns or a special medical condition.


 A bulb indicates alternative uses of the same item, which can also give you some ideas for gifts.


 A location sign indicates the places where you can find that specific item, mostly those considered the best places by the locals.

Fresh frankincense, Hojari type.

 A hand stop sign, painted with henna in a typical Bedouin style (tip of the fingers and a central dot in the palm), points out something to which you should pay attention.

 A magic lamp gives you some insider tips, especially regarding ideas for gifts and souvenirs.

 After the dollar icon, you will find the price range or approximate price of the item.

 By clicking the blue *kummah* icon at the bottom of each page from **Omani Identity** onwards, you go back to **Contents** for easier navigation of the book.

Parts of text in blue and underlined are clickable links.

All the items and products described in the main section of the book (**Omani Identity**) can also be located in **Souks and More** (the section dedicated to the most interesting souks and local shops) and in **Shops and Brands** (a list of high-end shops and brands promoting Omani heritage). In **Maps**, there are five maps of the main souks, and, at the end of the book, there are various **Appendices**.

• Cultural remarks

One of the most striking features that makes Oman so beautiful is its diversity, visible and palpable in many forms: the incredible variety of the landscapes; the different ethnicities and languages; the diversity in traditions, cuisines, costumes, and so on. The more you get to know this country and its people, the more you will be captivated by the multiple contributions that layer into its history and merge into a vibrant tapestry of beauty and serenity.

Some of the items, their names, and uses described in this book may differ depending on many factors, including geographical area, ethnicity, and language. The details provided here are the most common and widely known in Oman and have been verified with Omanis from different regions and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, be prepared for the possibility of hearing some different explanations during your trip.

Older frankincense, Hojari type.