

Excursion to Oman 9th-18th March 2013

In the summer semester 2013, the excursion of the tourism degree courses at the University of Applied Sciences Stralsund goes to the Sultanate of Oman from the 9th to the 18th of March. The group of eight master students Tourism Development Strategies and five bachelor students Leisure and Tourism Management are accompanied by Ms. Wallenburger and Prof. Rasmussen. Apart from interesting business appointments in the capital Muscat, highlights of the trip included a night in a Beduin desert camp, a visit to the former capital Nizwa as well as visits to a Wadi and a meeting with tourism students of our partner university GUtech in Muscat.

After an exhausting flight and the arrival on Sunday morning, plans to go on a sightseeing tour straight from the airport are delayed to the next day. Instead, everyone seizes the opportunity to get some rest and then get dinner at the Muscat waterfront. Monday starts with an amazing breakfast before our friendly Sri Lankan guide Ajit takes us on a bus tour around Muscat. We visit the impressive Sultan Qaboos Great Mosque, the local fish market as well as the Souk (a bazar where scarves, gowns, jewellery and other souvenirs are offered). Afterwards the group visits the Bait Al Zubair Museum where we learn about Oman's history, local dress, artefacts and past and present society. The last stop for the day takes us to the back of the Sultan's palace by the waterfront.

In the afternoon we have a meeting at the hotel with Mr. Nizar Ahamed, Tours Manager of our tour operator *Mark Tours*. He tells us a lot of interesting facts about the development of Oman's tourism industry in the course of the last decade and about challenges and strengths of the company. He has a lot of time to answer our questions and we get a good picture of the tour operator sector in Oman.

On Tuesday morning we leave quite early for our appointment at the Ministry of Tourism, where we are warmly greeted by Mohammed Mahmood Al Zadjali and Abdullah Bin Salim Al-Hajri Said Al Sinawi. We gain information about the operation of the Ministry, the development of tourism as well as future goals, which are mainly the three pillars of creating jobs, promoting the history and cultural heritage and preserving the environment. They also tell us about challenges and not only answer all our questions openly but also seem very interested in us and tourism in Germany.

On Wednesday morning we visit the PDO Oil & Gas Exhibition centre where we first learn about the production of oil and gas and the industry in Oman and then visit the Eco centre that aims at educating locals, especially children, about sustainable energy sources in a very interactive way. Afterwards we visit the Royal Opera House, which was opened recently in 2011 and combines traditional and modern features very impressively.

On Thursday morning we are picked up by five of *Mark Tours'* 4WDs to take us to the Wahiba Sands desert. On the way we visit the Wadi Bani Khalid, a riverbed forming natural pools of water, where we eat a delicious buffet lunch, go for a swim or simply enjoy the paradise-like atmosphere. When we reach the desert camp in the early evening after a fun ride through 30 km of sand dunes, the Jeeps take us up on a large dune to watch the spectacular sunset. Back in the camp we enjoy a buffet style dinner where some of the group even try camel meat. Smoking shishas, listening to our drivers' traditional music, dancing with them and even singing some German songs all makes for a perfect end to the day, before we go to bed in our tents and huts.

On Friday morning, some of the group get up before 5 a.m. in order to watch the beautiful sunrise up on the dune. After breakfast, there is the possibility to go on short dromedar rides before we drive back through the desert. On the way to Nizwa, we stop at a Beduine family's tent where many of the group let their hands be painted with Henna or buy handmade jewellery. We spend the night at the Nizwa Golden Tulip hotel. On Saturday we visit the old fort in Nizwa, Oman's former capital, and have some time to look around the local Souk before we head back to Muscat. On our way we also stepped back in history by visiting the Jabreen Castle which dates back to 1670. This castle was a beautiful palace for the Imam and his family.

On Sunday morning we are picked up by a bus from our partner university, the German University of Technology, GUTech. There we meet 16 students of the department of Sustainable Tourism and Regional Development (STRD) with whom we then take part in a joint workshop about local tourism development. Two mixed groups of students go to the Beehive Tombs in Halban and two others to the Al Felaj Fort. After returning from the trips, the four groups discuss various kinds of possible tourism development of these sites. Hence, the interaction between the students is enriching and will broaden horizons of all participants. We also have the opportunity to get to know two students from STRD who will spend their semester abroad at our institution. Thus, we will be able to meet again in a couple of days - that time at our university.

The visit at our partner university marked a great end to our trip before heading back home very early on Monday morning. It was an unforgettable excursion where all participants got an insight into Oman's history, its culture, friendly locals and the interesting ways in which the tourism industry is being developed.

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