



Kutline TK

OCEANIC OMAN

Limestone and DWS on the Arabian Peninsula

OMAN IS A CRESCENT-SHAPED chunk of rock and sand framed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Yemen to the west, and the Arabian Sea to the east. It sits across the Strait of Hormus from Iran and Pakistan – still, Oman’s one of the Middle East’s safest countries. Here, Westerners are welcomed, thanks in part to the country’s liberal-minded Sultan and his belief that tourism will benefit his realm.

The locals also welcome climbers because, well, we’re amusing. I’ll never forget deep-water soloing (DWS) up the 60-foot Tunnel Wall, near Bandar Jissah, and looking down to see a boatload of black-robed Omani women. Seconds later, I flamed out and shrieked like a 5-year-old girl before plunging into the tepid waters. When I surfaced, the women were laughing and photographing me with cell phones.



Vince Hempsall looks for potential, Bandar Jissah.

DWS is a relatively new sport, but nowhere is it newer than in Oman. It was only three years ago that a small group of expat teachers/climbers started exploring this Muslim country, quickly discovering their new home to be an untapped Thailand with some serious desert cragging thrown in. To date, all 40 established DWS routes are a short boat ride from Bandar Jissah beach (about 10 miles south of the capital, Muscat) and include everything from 5.9 traverses to 5.12a overhangs. Once you tire of wet shoes, 10 inland crags offer hundreds of routes from 5.6 trad to 5.12 sport in unreal oasis settings.

Climate: Muscat, Oman’s largest city, sees only 4 inches of rain. May through September, temperatures can climb to 110 F, though they don’t go much past 80 F in the cooler months. Inland, the country is primarily desert-like, so expect hot, dry days and cold nights.

Getting There: Qatar, Gulf Air, and British Airways fly daily into Muscat. Most of the climbing and DWS is within two hours of the city.

Camping: Pitch your tent on any land without a residence or a fence, because camping is free and legal on the Sultan’s property (pretty much the entire country). You can bivvy below most of the inland crags or on any of the beaches. Alternately, stay hotel it in Muscat (starting around \$50/night) and day-trip from there.

Guidebook: *Omanclimbing.com* has guides to Bandar Jissah and the various desert crags, including the must-do Hadash, La Gorgette, and Kubrah Canyon areas.

Food: Find cheap, delicious Indian food at Saravanna Bavan, in the town of Ruwi (southwest of Muscat). The best items are *masala dosas*, *vadas*, and *idlis* (a savory cake). Also, check out the Turkish House, one of the best eateries in Muscat’s coastal district of Al Khuwair. Try the hummus or a mixed platter, rocket salad, grilled hammour fillets, and sherry or a mint drink. A typical meal costs about 7 rials (\$17).

Rest-Day Entertainment: Four-wheel-drive SUV rentals (and gas) are inexpensive, so enjoy the beaches or head inland and explore the many *wadis*. (*Wadis* are oasis valleys where water collects during the infrequent rains.)

Insider Tip: Check out any of the Lulu’s shopping outlets around Muscat. “They’re like a cross between a mall and a gaudy discothèque,” says the local climber Ben Bollich. “They’re usually packed with locals, so the best time to go is during prayer hours.”

Ticklist:

Bandar Jissah:

- *Abraca Dabra Reloaded* (5.10c), Roof Wall – an upside-down jug haul.
- *Arête de Tête* (5.11a), Arête Wall – perfect pockets and an airy finish.

La Gorgette: this secluded, shaded inland area boasts Oman’s highest concentration of sport routes – 40-plus climbs of every grade on 100-foot orange dolomite walls.

Hadash: This mountain town is worth a visit for its cool temperatures, 20 moderate sport and trad climbs, and spectacular views of Wadi Mistal. A must-do is *Tufa Man* (5.10c), a Thai-style romp. 🏠



The Muscat climber Laurie Ottenbreit on *Arête de Tête* (5.11a), Arête Wall, Bandar Jissah.