

Yemen & Oman



A journey where nothing
went according to plan...

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October 2018



...A long wait in Oman

... Four of the six in the group arrived into Salalah in the early morning of the 16th of October. We had been warned that the multiple visas, which we had obtained electronically back home could cause a problem/confusion at the immigration. No such problem however occurred fortunately.

Our pre-arranged driver came and picked us all up and drove us to the **Al Jabal Hotel** on Sultan Qaboos Hospital road in Salalah. The other two members of the group had arrived one and two days earlier and were staying at the Hilton on the beach. The plan was to meet up here, have breakfast and then set-off to the Oman-Yemeni border of Serfeet where our guide Mohammed Shaif was supposed to meet us and take us around for a 6 day's tour around the Hadramouth region of eastern Yemen. We had heard on the weather forecast that there had been some Typhoons and bad weather, but were unaware just how bad it had been. It turned out there had been some very heavy rains and flooding's of a couple of Wadis as well as damaged roads. This meant that our guide had only been able to get as far as Al-Ghaydah in Yemen, not able to make it with the two 4-wheel vehicles all the way to the border to come and meet us. The border was also now closed all together we were informed.



...Biding our Time in Salalah



We now had to bid our time in Salalah, waiting for the roads to be mended and the water in the Wadis to subside. We were in contact with our guide on the Yemeni side, but were unaware of how bad the situation really was – hoping that we could still cross the southern border crossing in a couple of days.

While waiting we decided to make the most of our time in the Salalah region and went around to visit as many sights as we possibly could. The local guide Mohammed and his friend/Uncle Naji – were very helpful and took us to many of the worthwhile sights in the area. We set-out for the mountains and visited Jobs Grave. Had lunch at a famous Camel meat restaurant and continued onwards to Sumhuran castle ruins, the Wadi Darbat waterfalls and the Taqah castle. We also visited the Sultan Qaboos mosque in Salalah, the various markets and much more.

We had dinner at the Crowne Plaza Hotel this evening.





Travelling from Salalah to Mazayounah,

Having now seen some pictures and video-clips from the internet, we realized the Typhoon had caused very severe damages on the Yemeni side, and we understood we would not be able to get through into Yemen on the south border crossing. We then set about to plan to enter Yemen through the northern most border crossing at Mazayounah instead. We managed to persuade our local guide and his Uncle to take us this route instead – not knowing if we would be able to pass through here or not. We spent hours on rescheduling and set out the following morning from Salalah all packed up.

Our Journey went straight north up through the mountains. We made a stop at the Frankincense Trees at the Wadi Dawkah to see these sacred trees. The journey then continued straight up to the cross-road town of Thamrait where we stocked up on some food and water, not knowing where and when we would next have a chance to eat. From Thumrait we turned left and travelled some 200 km through the dessert on acceptable roads most of the way. It turned out the Typhoon had also caused severe damages also to these roads and in part completely wiped them out. Fortunately, the Omani government had managed to fix detour roads so we could continue all the way to the Omani-Yemeni border at Mazayounah.





In no-man's land for 6 hours....

We had rehearsed a number of back-up plans should we run into problems at the border. No sooner had we arrived at the first point – exiting Oman – when we first encountered difficulties. The Omani border control did not want to let us out as we did not have a letter from our embassy stating – they did not mind us entering into Yemen, and that we would do so on our own risk. Now – no embassy would of course ever issue such a document. After an hour or so and a couple of phone calls, they unwillingly let us pass (to our joy of course) – they did not think we would be let into Yemen anyway at the immigration border of Yemen our guide told us.

We continued some 2-3 km through no-man's land before arriving at a huge que of trucks waiting to cross into Yemen. We could pass this line and continue to the gate. This was a complete change to border of Oman where everything was very organized. We could go out and walk around freely and even take photographs without any restrictions. We thought it would be a quick fix to get through here. How wrong we were.





...Border crossing into Shiahn, Yemen

The border official did not want us to get in to Yemen with our Pre-issued visas (copies brought along) as they were issued in Saana by the Saudi supported Yemeni coalition. We were told we could get new visas issued at the border for 70 \$, had it not been for our already issued visas. We said we were willing to pay – but to no avail. We then tried a different tactic and sent one of our guides into the border town of Shiahn to find the local Imam and have him issue a document stating he would take full responsibility for us. After 5 hours of negotiations and having paid 70 \$ / head we were allowed to pass, but only for 1 night and we had to leave our passport as a deposit at the border.

After having eaten lunch at the Yemeni border canteen and having been allowed to enter Yemen it was already pitch dark. We now set-out to search for a hotel. The first three were full, but the forth had enough double rooms for us all. 5 Omani rial per double room (very cheap). We stayed in the centre of the small town (Village) of Shihan. We found a restaurant near the centre where we sat on a carpet outdoors and waited for the food to be prepared. I had a chance to inspect the kitchen first. The food was alright and we ate with our fingers, as they do, from a shared plate put in the centre for everyone to reach. I had brought a long a bottle of Riesling, which we had planned to drink, but it fell out from my back-pack and broke before we could enjoy the contents. We took an early evening after a long and exhausting day.





Shiahn and the centre of the village

We woke up full of expectations this Friday morning not knowing what we would be able to do, see and visit during our very short time in the village and its surroundings. We started off the day by taking a traditional breakfast (excellent bread) outside our hotel in the open on a carpet sitting down on the ground as is customary here.

We had been invited to meet with the local Imam, but before this I set out on a walk about to explore a little of the small village centre. I noted two things which stood out. Every man carried a weapon, apart from the traditional dagger – Jambiya. Also, I was struck by how open and friendly everyone was – wanting to talk, engage and having his picture taken. We were allowed to photograph just about everything and anybody.





A visit to the Imam of Shiahn



The Imam was the key for us to cross into Yemen to start with. We then felt it was a good place also to distribute many of the clothes, schoolbooks, pens and footballs which we had brought along. It was well received and after some group photos we were then invited to visit one of the homes to see how the interior looks like and as always enjoy some local coffee or tea.

The women and children are separated from the men. It was possible to take pictures of the children and men, but the women is more difficult. Some don't mind, but the majority are very careful about not showing their faces (almost always covered). They are also very proud of their weapons and like to pose with them and having their pictures taken as well.





Visiting a Bedouin camp.

40 km south of Shiahn...

Our last stop on this short visit to Yemen went to a Bedouin camp some 40 km south of Shiahn. This is also where the road ended abruptly as it had been demolished by the Typhoon a few days earlier.

We were invited with open arms. They were also very pleased with all the clothes, schoolbooks, toys etc. that we had brought along. The women in our group were also invited to a separate tent where only women were allowed. They served also food and a fresh watermelon. Very friendly and hospital people. One of the younger women wore breezes to correct her teeth – we thought this was quite advanced. She also pointed out to one of the women in our group that maybe she should also do something with her teeth. This was the highlight of the trip

