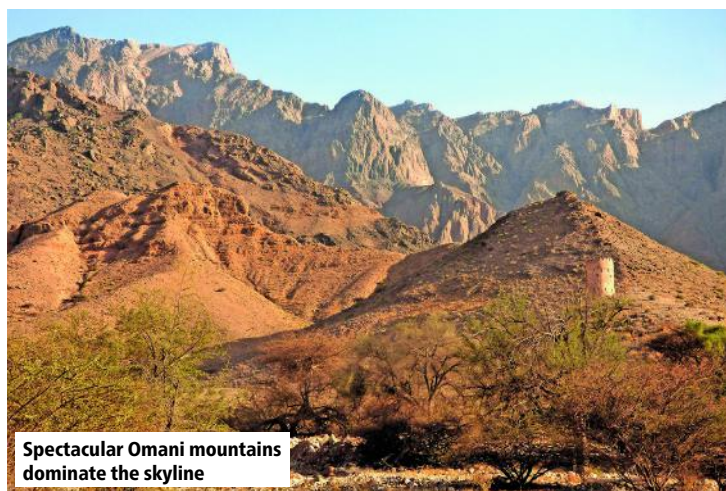


One of the planet's quietest breakfast locations



'Skinny mocha-latte with an extra shot when you get a minute, please'



Spectacular Omani mountains dominate the skyline

served. Bumblebee has the 3.9-litre V8 that's standard for late Discovery 1s in the Gulf; and when this works through her ZF autobox and hauls around her fully-laden weight with underbody protection, full-spec roof rack and overland gear, the fuel consumption comes in at an eye-watering 10mpg. So, a couple of jerry cans were vital.

I left my base in the rural eastern Emirate of Fujairah and headed for the nearby Omani border. British citizens are welcomed in Oman and border formalities are very few – just sort

out temporary car insurance and a visa, and you're in. Then follows a four-hour blat on tarmac south-east to Muscat – the friendly and laid-back Omani capital, my logistics base for the trip – where I wanted to take on fuel and supplies. When I'm visiting Muscat I always stay at the Pioneer Hotel on the outskirts, a cheerful and clean place that welcomes Land Rover travellers, and I was able to sort out various bits and bobs here before heading south, across the Tropic of Cancer and through the mountains.

Oman is mountainous in the north but this very quickly drops away to the Jiddat al-Harasis desert – a vast, flat expanse of wind-scoured gravel and sand, the home of the Bani Harasis clan of Bedouin, and also site of the largest field of meteorites in the region

It is also home to the Arabian oryx, a kind of antelope that is said to be the origin of the myth of the unicorn. This is the first planned destination – and, sure enough, I'm able to turn off the tarmac and drop into the sands shortly south of Nizwa.

OMAN – NEED TO KNOW

- Language: Arabic, English, Hindi
- Currency: Omani rial. 1 rial = £2
- Cost of petrol: 36p per litre
- Time difference to UK: +3hr
- Drive on the right
- Which maps? Geo Sheet Maps, International Travel Maps and Insight Travel Maps are all highly recommended.
- Rights of way: Generally speaking, there are no issues anywhere apart from military land

and farmland, but you may have to do some fast talking in tribal areas.

- I wild-camped in some of the most stunning locations imaginable. Also I stayed at: Jawharet Al Kheir Guesthouse in Salalah (phone +968 9571 9000); and Pioneer Hotel in Muscat (phone +968 2472 8500)
- How I got there: I drove over the border from the UAE. Flights to Muscat are easy to arrange from the UK and most major countries.

Into the desert

Highlight: Big revs on fesh-fesh

The desert here is pretty flat and the Disco makes good time on a steady heading west for much of the time. Gravel desert, *hamada* in Arabic, is firm and rocky because the sand has been scraped off by the action of countless windstorms. But the sand has to go somewhere, so it collects together in dunes or in areas called *fesh-fesh* – soft, powdery stuff like talcum powder. Driving an automatic in soft sand is interesting – with a manual