

YEMEN

Ancient Land of Sheba

Tour Code YE
2008 Departure – 08 December

Day 1

Monday 8 December

Fly UK to Sana'a

Morning flight from Heathrow with Turkish Airways via Istanbul arriving early the following morning arrival into Sana'a. Transfer to the Mercure hotel for three nights

Day 2

PM Old City tour

Morning at leisure. In the afternoon we have a tour through the capital's enchanting old city medina. The medieval stone tower-houses are an architectural gem, and the smells and sounds of the old souk recount a biblical scene. Welcome dinner in a traditional restaurant (B,D)

Day 3

Visit Shibam, Thulla and Kawkaban

We start today with a visit to the village of ancient Thulla, an excellent example of Yemeni architecture in rock and stone. We continue to the great mosque of Shibam before driving up a spectacular approach to the

dramatic cliff-top town of Kawkaban. We return to Sana'a in the late afternoon. (B,D)

Day 4

Drive to Marib. Visit ancient city and dam.

Today we head east through a region of arid mountains and dead volcanoes to Marib, the capital of the Sabaeans on the edge of the desolate 'Empty Quarter'. The capital of the legendary Queen of Sheba, we visit the remains of the ancient dam, which for 1400 years made the arid desert blossom and supported an advanced culture. We also visit the remains of the 8th century BC Temple of Bilqis (the local name for Sheba) and the ancient mud-brick city of Marib. Overnight at the Bilqis hotel (B,D)

Day 5

Drive across the Empty Quarter to Seiyun

Following the route of past travellers such as Thesiger and Stark we travel across the 'Empty Quarter' or *Arrub al Khali*, the vast section of

open desert in northeastern Yemen. Travelling for most of the day, the varying dunned and flat landscape gradually changes shape to form the dramatic Wadi Hadhramaut, a fascinating region of Yemeni culture and tribal history. We arrive at Seiyun and spend two nights at the Al Howta hotel (B,D)

Day 6

In Seiyun, visit Tarim and Shibam

Seiyun is a fascinating place with stunning mud brick architecture, old mosques and a thriving souk area. We visit the former Sultan's Palace with its excellent museum. Close to Seiyun is Tarim, the spiritual centre of the south. Over three hundred mosques and many libraries of great importance were here. Surrounding the Muhdar Mosque are the great houses of wealthy traders of the last century who made their fortunes in Indonesia. The 300 year old mud skyscrapers of Shibam are a listed UNESCO world heritage site and rightly so. The first sight of these immense ancient tower-

houses is both overwhelming and humbling, surely a highlight of this fascinating country's ancient past. We return to Seiyun for our second night stay (B,D)

Day 7

Drive to Al Mukulla via Al Hajarain and Wadi Doan

Driving south today we head for the coastal town of Al Mukulla. En route we visit the mud house village of Al Hajarain along the Wadi Doan; the old trading route from the coast to the Hadhramaut. In the afternoon we have a tour around the old town with its mixed architectural styles of Yemeni, Arab and Indian. Tonight we enjoy a traditional Yemeni dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight at the Holiday Inn (B,D)

Day 8

Visit Bir Ali and ancient Qena. Drive to Aden

We drive along the coast through dramatic volcanic landscapes to Bir Ali, once the site of the ancient harbour of Qena, the first port of the incense-trading route. We pause to stroll along the white sand beach and perhaps to take a swim in the azure waters before continuing to Aden arriving in the late afternoon. Overnight at the Mercure hotel with dinner (B,D)

Day 9

Visit Aden. Drive to Taiz

This morning we visit Aden, an important trading port for many centuries, linking Europe with the East. Many different peoples have ruled the city over the years, including the British who held Aden for 130 years following the construction of the Suez Canal. Despite its long history, the majority of Aden is modern, with one or two exceptions. The Aldarus Mosque was originally built in the 14th century, and the Cisterns of Tawila, which date back to the 1st century AD. We continue north, climbing inland to the mountainous province of Taiz. Located at an altitude of 1400m Taiz enjoys a favourable climate. It was an important trade centre in medieval times linking caravans from Mokha to Sana'a. Superb mosques and palaces were constructed and water was brought from Mount Saber by aqueduct. Two nights at the Sofitel hotel with dinner (B,D)

Day 10

Taiz old city tour. Visit Jibla, Ibb and Al Janad

This morning we visit the old walled quarter of Taiz, including the Al Ashrafiya mosque dating from the 13th century. Also the former Palace of Imam Ahmed, now housing an impressive

museum crammed with memorabilia. In the afternoon we visit Al Janad, the site of Yemen's oldest mosque and the mountain village of Jibla with its narrow streets and busy souk. We also stop to see the granary town of Ibb located on a hilltop at over 1800m. We return to Taiz and enjoy a traditional dinner in a local restaurant (B,D)

Day 11

Visit Mokka and Zabid. Drive to Al Hodeidah

This morning we visit Mokka, an old coffee port that grew in importance during the 17th century, when fashionable coffee houses sprang up over Europe. At that time, Yemen had a virtual monopoly over coffee trade. Since Aden became the main port and other countries began to grow coffee, Mokka fell into decline and is now a bleak reminder of its former glory. Heading north we reach Zabid, an important centre for Islamic teaching with a remarkable past. Continuing via the market town of Beit al Faqih we reach Hodeida, Yemen's main fish port and capital of the coastal Tihama region. Overnight at the Taj Awsan hotel. Dinner at a local fish restaurant (B,D)

Day 12
Drive to Sana'a via
Manahka and Al Hajjarah

Heading into the Haraz mountains, winding steeply through the hills and valleys we reach the hilltop town of Manahka at 2150m. The whole Haraz area is a beautiful example of rural Yemeni terrace culture. We walk to the nearby-fortified village of Al Hajjarah, its tightly packed houses literally clinging to the rock. Later we continue to Sana'a for our final evening to enjoy a folkloric show with dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at the Mercure hotel (B,D)

Day 13
Visit Wadi Dahr .
Drive to Al Mahweet

This morning we drive the short distance to Wadi Dahr to view the towering old palace of Imam Yahya, built on an isolated rock, with spectacular views across the plateau. Heading west we drive via At-Tawila village into the Al Mahweet region known for its natural scenic beauty. We arrive at Al Mahweet hotel wonderfully situated overlooking the rugged mountain ranges of the region (B,D)

Day 14
Walk in Al Mahweet region
PM At leisure in Sana'a

There will be the option to join a walk this morning to explore the surrounding

villages and countryside with its lush green terracing. We return to Sana'a in the early afternoon and enjoy time at leisure in the old city before our farewell dinner at a local restaurant. Late transfer to Sana'a airport (B,D)

Day 15
Monday 22 December
Fly via Istanbul to London

We depart Sana'a in the early hours on our overnight flight via Istanbul arriving back into Heathrow at Terminal 3 in the morning

Included meals indicated as (B) Breakfast and (D) Dinner

This detailed 15 day tour offers a rich and varied insight into the culture, history and scenic beauty of Yemen. Known to the Romans as Arabia Felix (fortunate Arabia), Yemen is the most fertile region of the Arabian Peninsula. The ancient land of the Queen of Sheba lay on the great trade routes from the East and grew wealthy trading frankincense and myrrh. Yemen today remains one of the world's most mysterious places and the tour concentrates on its varying architectural, cultural and scenic wonders. From the unique stone-tower houses of Sana'a, the hilltop mountain villages of the Haraz range, the mud brick architecture of the Hadhramaut and the colour of the Red Sea fishing ports, Yemen never fails to awe inspire even the most seasoned traveller, past and present

What the tour cost of £1995-00 includes:

- ❖ **Accompanied from London by Patrick Syder.** Patrick has led previous trips to Yemen and has previously worked alongside your Yemen guide. Patrick has a degree in Geology and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of London. He is also a renowned travel photographer
- ❖ **Specialist Yemeni guide for the duration of the tour**
- ❖ Scheduled international flights from Heathrow with Turkish Airways
- ❖ Scheduled internal flight with Yemenia Airways
- ❖ A/C quality 4WD Toyota Land cruisers and A/C minibus
- ❖ Full sightseeing programme including entrance fees
- ❖ Local four star hotels on a half board basis and some dinners at quality restaurants
- ❖ All departure and government taxes
- ❖ All airport transfers
- ❖ Porter, hotel, restaurant staff gratuities

Please also note:

- ❖ The international Turkish Airways flight is purchased through an ATOL bonded agent
- ❖ The following are excluded from the tour price – visa fee, gratuities (guide and driver) and items of a personal nature
- ❖ There is a single room supplement charge of £250.00