



Riders show off their skills during one of Oman's traditional desert camel races

From £605,000: The Malkai is a new 200-acre complex of luxurious residential properties and a country club and hotel 40 minutes from Muscat airport in Oman. For more information, visit www.themalkai.com, or email cluttons@themalkai.com

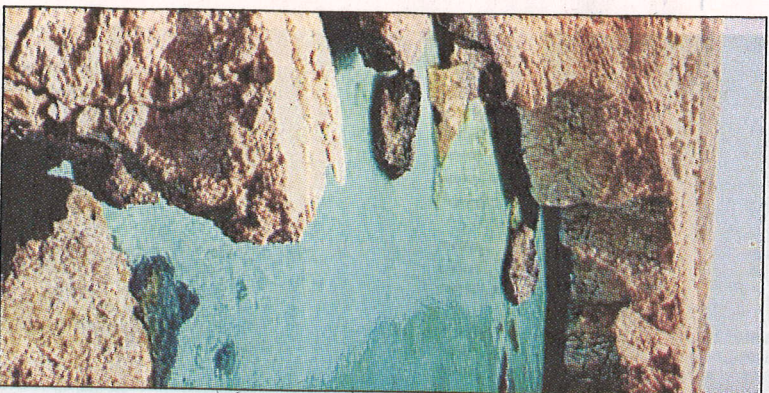
Soaring mountains, deep waterfalls and bags of history make Oman a fascinating place to buy a second home, says **Cathy Hawker**

A good Oman

FACT and fiction merge in the frankincense-scented Sultanate of Oman, eight hours' flight from London. Legend claims that Sinbad set sail from Oman on his seafaring adventures and that the Queen of Sheba built a sumptuous palace in the cool hills of Dhofar in the south.

The facts, however, are more straightforward. The first country in the Arabian Gulf to offer freehold title to foreigners within certain tourist developments has seen steep price rises since 2006 and presents an interesting contrast to the skyscrapers of Dubai.

Oman's much-respected ruler Sultan Qaboos knows that his oil reserves are running dry and has identified tourism as the way forward. So far, so like Dubai, but Dubai this certainly isn't. Yes, Starbucks and McDonald's have arrived but to date, Oman is developing more slowly with no residential property above three storeys and without the razzle-dazzle of its near neighbour. Oman also has a knockout advantage: a civilisation going back thousands of years. This is a country with history



Oman has 1,100 miles of breathtaking coastline as well as mountains and wadis

'Oman is developing without the razzle-dazzle of its near neighbour'

and great geographical beauty. There are 1,100 miles of coastline, soaring mountains, waterfalls and *wadis* — dried riverbeds. In one day you can swim with dolphins, go reef diving, visit mountainside forts or camp in the desert beside Bedouin sites.

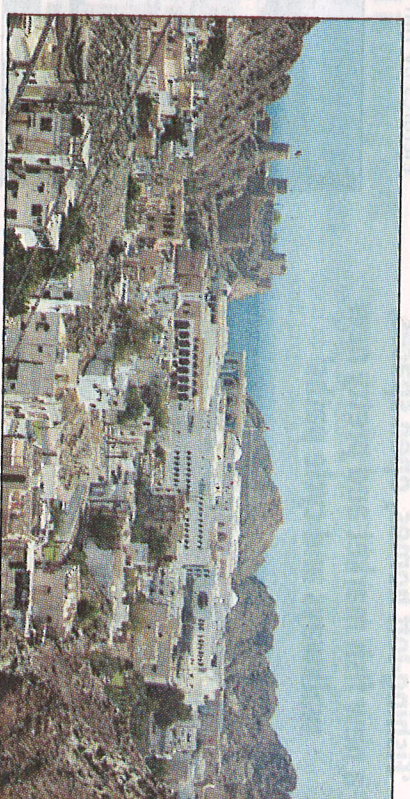
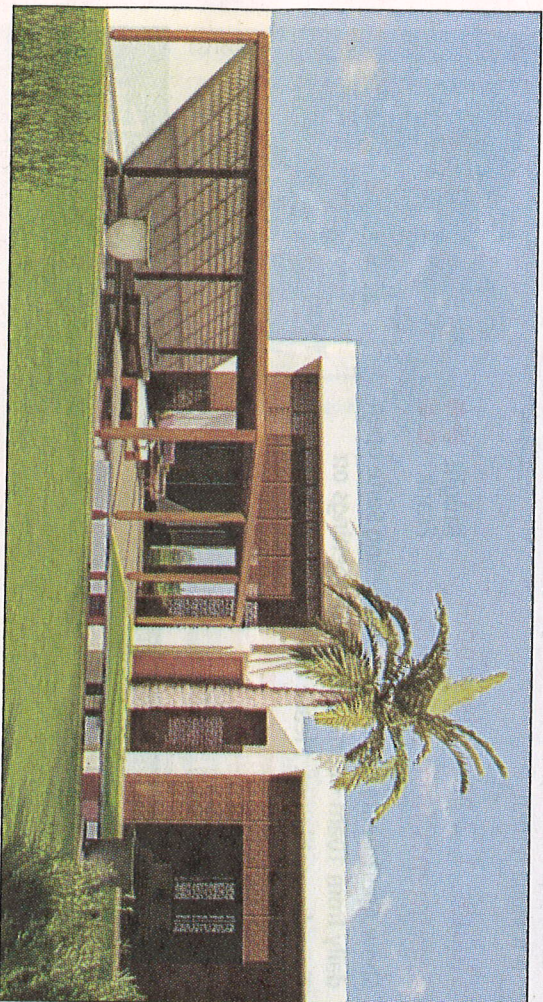
And it is safe. The British Army helped Eton- and Sandhurst-educated Sultan Qaboos come to power in 1970 when his impoverished country had just found oil. The Sultan has spent well, building hospitals and schools. In 2006, he introduced Integrated

Tourism Complexes (ITC) allowing non-Omanis to buy freehold property in certain developments.

Today, there are six substantial ITC projects under construction with the first buyers due to take possession this year.

The latest to launch is one of the smallest: The Malkai is a country club and hotel in Barka, 40 minutes from Muscat airport. On a 200-acre plot straddled with date palms and mangoes developer Al Meeen plans a nine-hole Gary Player-designed "desert oasis" golf course, spa and a 41-room hotel managed by noted hotelier GHM. Property, due for completion in 2010,

Hotel suites at The Malkai will each have a private pool and access to all the country club's facilities



The fort looks out to sea and dominates the historic old town of Muscat in Oman

includes 101 four-bedroom villas of a whopping 5,000sq ft for an equally large £1.8 million and 92 two-bedroom suites at £605,000. "Omanis have large plots and gardens and that's what I wanted to create here," says developer Panikaj Khinji.

Five years ago, Khinji was responsible for bringing the prize-winning hotel The Ochedi to Muscat. In the same group is The Setai in South Beach, Miami, and The Datal in Malaysia. "We feel the investment potential of the early ITC projects are good," says Ian Gladwin of Cluttons. "Investors have already realised profits of between 23 per cent and 100 per cent since 2006."

Elsewhere, overseas buyers can pay from £159,280 for a two-bedroom apartment at The Wave, Muscat, where 4,000 units are planned over the next five years, and from £249,300 at Muscat Hills Golf and Country Club. Both developments have golf courses, hotels and spas.

The largest new development is The Blue City where Hamptons plans to sell houses by Foster + Partners later this year. Unlike the other residential developments, Blue City will be a fully integrated new town covering 20 square miles aiming to attract companies and permanent residents.

Facfile

- Stamp Duty is three per cent in Oman.
- There is no personal tax.
- Buyers of ITC projects receive residency visas for themselves and their family.
- Annual maintenance charges at The Malkai are estimated to be between £10,000 and £12,500.
- Owners at The Malkai can place their property into the hotel rental pool.
- Oman Air (www.omanair.aero) flies six times a week from Gatwick to Muscat and British Airways (www.ba.com) flies daily from Heathrow to Muscat via Abu Dhabi.

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