

# Serendipity Travels

## AROUND THE WORLD 2022

Our travels in October—November 2022 took us around the world from west to east. Join us as our journey continues around the Arabian Peninsula. Previously, we visited [Greece, Israel](#), and [Egypt](#).

### Part 3: Jordan and Oman

2-3 November 2022

#### Aqaba, Jordan [35° E]

The ship docked in Aqaba, Jordan, just before noon on the 2nd. Customs in Jordan is pretty straightforward. We disembarked, gave them our passports, they checked to ensure the passport picture matched our face, then they gave us a receipt for the passport which they will hold until we are ready to depart.

#### Wadi Rum

That done, we boarded a bus. Our “Wonders of Jordan Overnight” excursion will take us to Wadi Rum and Petra. On the first afternoon, we visited Wadi Rum, a very large valley that was the site of Lawrence of Arabia’s famous battle. The scenery is spectacular. We had lunch in a Bedouin camp, rode in the back of a Toyota pickup over several miles with three stops, and had champagne as the sun set behind one of the mountains of the wadi. Back to the coach, we rode to Petra for dinner and hotel.



Today’s pictures are at [Wadi Rum 2022](#).

#### Petra

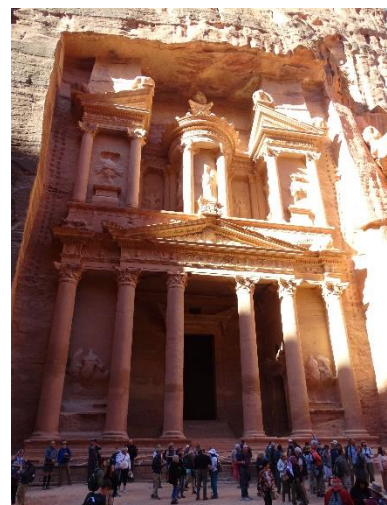
Our hotel in Petra was across the street from the entrance to the Petra National Park. The morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, we walked into the park. Petra is a unique place. In the centuries surrounding the birth of Christ, it was a critical stop on the trade routes between Africa, Asia, and Europe. The Nabateans built a city of some 40,000 inhabitants where wayfarers could water their camels, have a bite to eat, and be guided to the next watering hole.

Access to the city is through a narrow path created when an earthquake split the sandstone predominant in the area. Homes, and all other buildings, are carved into the sandstone. The most impressive of the remaining structures is “The Treasury.” Probably more temple than treasure repository, this is the most preserved of all the façades in Petra. The pictures of Petra include an overall view of the Treasury, some details of the façade, and other scenes.

The total distance from the entrance to the point where we turned for our journey back is about 2½ miles. Into the park, the slope is 1% down. On the way back out, it is the opposite. It took us about 4 hours to walk down, with lots of interpretive stops with our guide Sami. We made the return journey in an hour, with several stops for water and a quick rest. The journey back to the ship included a stop for lunch and another for souvenir shopping.

Upon return to the ship, we noticed concertina wire (barbed wire) coils mounted on the boat just below the gunwales. We are about to sail the Gulf of Aden, where Somali Pirates have been known to operate. We will be at sea for several days, traversing a distance comparable to that between Ketchikan, Alaska, and Cabo San Lucas, Baja California.

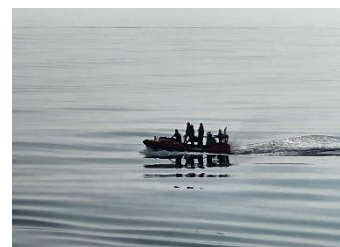
Today's pictures are at [Petra 2022](#).



## 4-8 November 2022

### At Sea

If you watched the movie *Captain Philips* you will be aware of the threats that affect ship traffic in the Gulf of Aden. Although there have been fewer attempts and instances of piracy in the past years, it is still a concern. The ship took several precautions, outlined in the letter that is one of the pictures. Concertina wire was strung around the perimeter of the ship, just below the walkway. At the stern, a second layer was added where the crew handles stern lines. Midway down the Red Sea, we slowed and onboarded some armed personnel. They have stayed with us until we are past the eastern border of Somalia. At night, much of the exterior lighting of the ship is off, making us much darker than the typical cruise ship.



Apart from that mentioned, there were no other measures obvious to the passengers. Today (8 November), we dock in Salalah, Oman. I expect the concertina wire and the armed guards will leave us at that time.

Pictures of the preparations for the transit, as well as other scenes of on-board life, are at [On the Viking Mars 2022](#).

## 8-9 November 2022

### Salālah, Oman [54° E] and a Sea Day

Salālah is located on the southern shore of Oman, east of the border with Yemen. It is a port city from ancient times. The most famous product of the area is frankincense, which is made from the sap of a local tree. We were told that this is the only place in the world where frankincense is harvested. Once, an ounce of Frankincense was as valuable as an ounce of gold. Today, you can get a sandwich bag full of it for \$3.00.

We took the "Salālah City Views" tour, viewing the outside of the main mosque in town and the outside of the Sultan's summer palace. We also visited the Museum of Frankincense Land which has several interesting exhibits about ship building and ancient ways. We also stopped at a fruit stand where we had a refreshing drink of coconut water.



While we were touring, the crew removed the concertina wire. We're headed into safer waters. Departing Salālah, we have another sea day before we reach Muscat, the capital city of Oman.

Today's pictures are at [Salalah 2022](#).

## 10 November 2022

### Muscat, Oman [58° E]

Our "Muscat City Tour" gave us the highlights of Oman's capital city. We first visited the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. Sultan Qaboos bin Said was the ruler of Oman for almost 50 years, holding the distinction of being the longest-serving leader in the Arab world. He passed away in 2020. As he was childless, the rule passed to his cousin Haitham bin Tarik. He seems to have been well-regarded by his subjects, both of our Omani tour guides spoke highly of him. Qaboos was responsible for many improvements in Oman, investing money from oil revenues. He did manage to put aside some money for a nice yacht.

The mosque is one of those investments. It was completed in 2001. It can accommodate 20,000 worshippers. Among the superlatives are one of the largest single carpets in the world, which covers the floor of the main hall, and a huge chandelier. Qaboos desired that the mosque be accessible to non-believers, so that they may view the beauty of Islamic art. We did have to dress appropriately, men in long pants, women in long pants or dresses, long sleeves, and covered hair. A bit uncomfortable since the temperature was in the mid-80s, but worth the effort.

After the mosque, we visited a small museum, named Bait Al Zubair, which is devoted to Omani culture. There we saw items of dress for both men and women, weapons, and musical instruments. That was followed by a trip to the Royal Palace, where we took a quick look at the grounds. The last stop on our tour was the Mutrah Souk—an emporium of shops offering clothing, kitchen wares, and of course many knickknacks for the tourist.



Prior to today, our journey has taken us ever farther from Bellingham, which is 122° West longitude. When we leave the dock tonight, our travels will bring us closer to home. Muscat, at 58° E is 180° around the world (in longitude) from Bellingham.

Today's pictures are at [Muscat 2022](#).

## 11-12 November 2022

### At Sea

Nothing new here. We attended several talks about the culture, religion, and sights to be seen in our upcoming stop in Mumbai.

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The journey continues to [India and Sri Lanka](#) in Part IV of this log.