

Footsteps in the Sand | of sand, salt, souks and wadis  
Oman | Jordan  
A blogger's journal

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[footstepsinthesand.home.blog](http://footstepsinthesand.home.blog)

# Footsteps in the Sand

*Of sand, salt, souks and wadis*

Oman & Jordan  
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Stefan Kussy

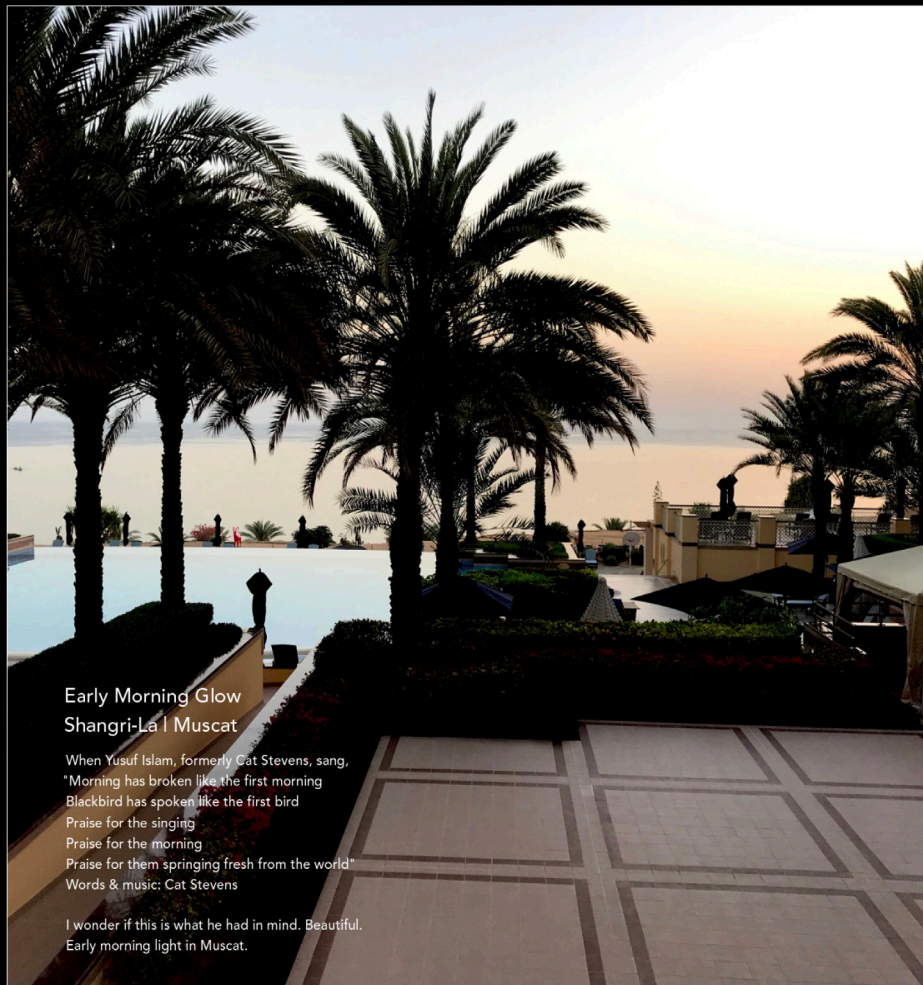
OMAN



Jabreen Castle



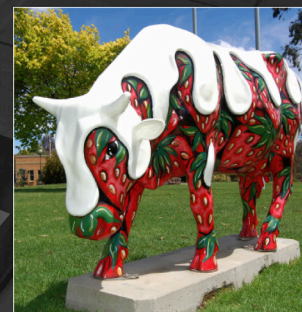
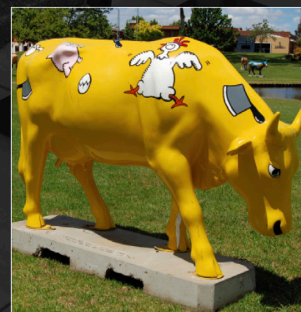




Early Morning Glow  
Shangri-La | Muscat

When Yusuf Islam, formerly Cat Stevens, sang,  
 "Morning has broken like the first morning  
 Blackbird has spoken like the first bird  
 Praise for the singing  
 Praise for the morning  
 Praise for them springing fresh from the world"  
 Words & music: Cat Stevens

I wonder if this is what he had in mind. Beautiful.  
 Early morning light in Muscat.



Cows in Shepparton;  
Nubian Ibex in Oman

If you've driven through or visited Shepparton, Victoria, you will know that the public park contains numerous plaster cows that are painted in rather wonderful patterns and designs.

We have found the equivalent in Muscat at Shangri-La resort. The Omani version features Nubian ibex and they are painted in equally creative ways as their Shepparton counterparts. The Nubian ibex designs are part of an art prize. They look fabulous scattered across the forecourt of the Shangri-La Muscat resort.





### Of Souks and Spices Nizwa Souk

Souks are *similar* to medinas in Morocco with their narrow lanes and multitude of traders.

The Nizwa souk, abounds with spices, the best candied ginger on the planet, and a separate souk dedicated to a wide range of Oman dates.

Have I said how sensationally delicious the candied ginger tastes? You should come and get some. Oh, that's right, we're here and you're not?

Yes, travel snobbery is unbearable, as unbearably bad as the ginger is indescribably good.



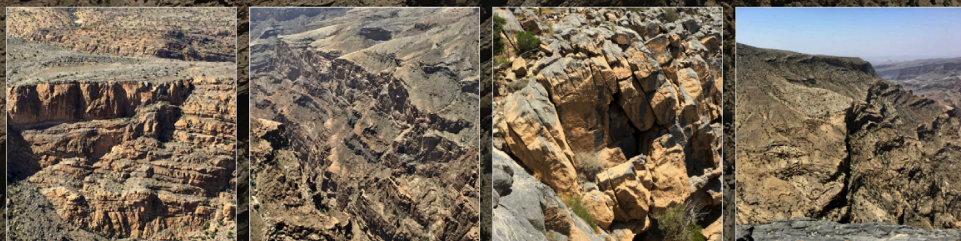


## Majestic Mountains & the Majesty of Nature

There is Greenwich Mean Time, Caesium Atomic Time and travel time but nothing compares with geological time. There isn't a timepiece big enough to measure geological time, although the mountain range at Jabal Akhdar in Oman displays the enormous timescale and powerful majesty of time that stretches across the aeons. Chronostratigraphy is a term that comes to mind. Majestic mountains and the majesty of nature, indeed.

Music Fact: Led Zeppelin released "Misty Mountain Hop" on their fourth album, known as Led Zeppelin IV, Untitled, Four Symbols or ZOSO.

The rock band Mountain, formed in July 1969, originally consisted of guitarist and lead vocalist Leslie West, bassist and second vocalist Felix Pappalardi, drummer Norman "N. D." Smart and keyboardist Steve Knight.







## Nizwa Fort and The Ancient Capital of Oman

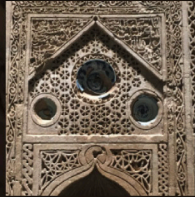
Nizwa Fort, located in Nizwa, the ancient capital city of Oman, was built by Imam Sultan Bin Saif Al Yaribi, who drove the Portuguese from Oman in the middle of the seventeenth century. As the name suggests, it was a fortified facility designed to resist invaders as well as a significant location for traders.

The defences inside the fort were diabolical. Access to the huge parapet with its cannons had to be negotiated via a narrow, dark stairwell with a number of right angle turns. At each of the turns and landings, there were holes where the landing should have been. In the dark, it was a case of, 'watch the first step....it's a long way down or, at the least, you would injure yourself seriously. It adds new meaning to a stair...well. If the misstep didn't get you, the defenders also had slots in the support beams above the landing through which they would pour boiling oils onto the unsuspecting invaders.

If, and that's a big "if", you got through or survived these torturous defences, you would enter the parapet from the one person wide stairwell to the open area on the parapet to be met with a barrage of defenders with bows and arrows, lances and other impaling weapons. Easier to get on with your neighbours. That's why Oman is called the Switzerland of the Middle East.

The adjoining Souk to Nizwa Fort is a souk/marketplace for pottery, silver goods and a separate souk for a vast selection of exceptionally tasty dates. When visiting Nizwa, make a date to visit the Souk.





## The Switzerland of the Middle East

Thanks, Rami and Ahmed, for sharing the vast knowledge you have about your country and culture. We had some free-form, engaging conversations and exchanges of ideas.

I've tried the best I can to recount the information accurately. Amendments and corrections welcome.

Oman's population is 4 million.

100 years ago, when Oman was an empire, it held one state in Africa. The inhabitants brought back spices, language and other influences to Oman that permeate Omani daily life today.

Oman was invaded by and ruled over by the Portuguese. At least it wasn't the Romans, Ottomans or Venetians this time. The Persians also invaded now and then. You can see forts positioned at all the high vantage points on the mountains and inland to protect the trade routes and warn against invaders. You would think the brutally rugged mountains would do a pretty good job of deterring invaders.

There are 500 Portuguese forts across Oman.

Oman is far more mountainous than I expected. I thought there would be more flat areas. The diverse landscape ranges from extreme mountains and towering sand dunes to flat terrain and the sea.

Sultan Qaboos took the throne in a forceful overthrow of his father when he was 30. He is now 70. The British government sent troops to help overthrow the previous Sultan thereby creating strong ties with the English monarchy. It was not a gentle changeover. It was civil war. Once he overthrew his father, Sultan Qaboos proceeded to build the vision he had for a modern Oman.

The Oman coat of arms features crossed swords and a dagger on a shield. Some also have a crown above the swords indicating the close ties with English royalty as a result of their support.

The Sultan is not married, although he did have a wife at one stage, and has no heir to the throne. Following his death, if a successor is not appointed within three days, the military will take over. As a last resort resort, the Sultan has written three letters kept in different locations across the country with his nominated names to succeed him. Apparently, there is a strong indication that the Sultan's cousin, with whom he is close, is his choice. The modernisation of Oman is a direct result of the Sultan's vision. He is revered and respected by the Omani people. As you saw, highways, housing and employment are high. There are problems, as we could see from the number of police facilities with accompanying jails that were built or under construction, although you have to remember that you can go to jail for running a red traffic light. There is no rail system and limited bus services. Most people prefer to own cars, a bit like Australia.

Oman is neutral and often hosts opposing sides from neighbouring countries involved in war and civil unrest. Other nations respect Oman's neutrality. Safety is paramount in maintaining its role as a neutral nation.



## The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Jordan is a Hashemite kingdom because it is ruled by the Hashemite dynasty, who claim direct lineage from the prophet Mohammed.

Jordan means running water in Aramaic.

Monthly salary US\$600

Housing rental: Minimum US\$500/month

Petrol US\$6/gallon or AU\$1.50/litre

The landscape is challenging; no transport system; people rely on small buses, cars, taxis and Uber, although the price of petrol makes it expensive.

The government is encouraging hybrid car imports to get rid of or reduce the reliance on petrol due to the high cost of petrol. There is a 200% tax on cars.

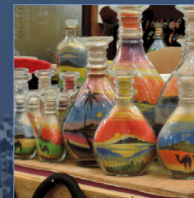
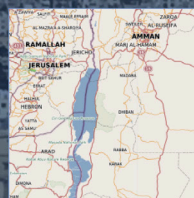
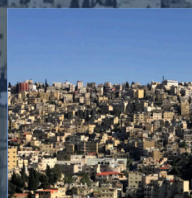
The national flower is the black iris. Luckily, we are here during the black iris season and we happened to spot one on the side of the road.

The colours of the flag recognise the four tribes that were united to form one nation and the seven points of the star on the flag refer to the number of days it took to create the universe, including one day of rest.

Bagpipes were made originally by the Syrians and Iranians. The British took them to Britain and then they made their way back to the Middle East. We weren't told whether the Syrians knew how to play the Scottish song, "Ye cannae shove yer grannie aff the bus".

Jordan is a small country of 90,000 square kms.

The Hashemite Fund for the Development of Jordan Badia was established with the objective of developing the Jordan Badia, or, the arid areas encompassing much of Jordan's land. Badia means Sahara or desert. The overall aim of the Fund is to improve the socio-economic conditions in the Badia.



Hashemite derives from Hashem, Muhammad's family name.

The city Amman is pronounced "um-man"

Israel means "one who wrestled with god" and is based on a story about a wrestling match between Gabriel and Jacob.

There are 45 million olive trees in Jordan. A double shot of olive oil in the morning is considered good for your health.

All Jordanian Muslims are Sunni, which means "submission to God". The rest of Jordanians are Christians.

The Ottomans occupied Jordan for 400 years and, of course, the Romans, the bloody Romans were here, too. Is there anywhere they didn't conquer? Oh, that's right, we didn't hear anything about them in Oman. Oman had the Persians and the British.

Wadi Rum is considered where modern Jordan began.

Quite a few trees have a distinctive lean due to strong winds in the area.

We saw a number of refugee camps, that are distinguishable from Bedouin camps, on the side of the roads. There are over 2 million Syrian refugees in Jordan, which is an issue for a poor country like Jordan that has a lack of support infrastructure and a scarcity of water.

Jordan is greener in parts than Oman.

This is the first country where we have noticed security screening everytime you enter your hotel. Cars are checked underneath with mirrors, while spike barriers and solid metal ramps are set up to stop anyone running the security barrier in a vehicle.





## Petra: The Neverending Excavation

Beyond The Treasury, if you take the path to the right as you face The Treasury, the valley opens up in contrast to the narrowness of the SIQ to reveal the incredible expanse that was and remains of Petra. To reinforce, what you see is only 4% of the entirety of Petra. Most of it is still buried. If it's astounding to begin with, to say that what you can see is only 4% of Petra makes it pretzel twisting and mindbogglingly incomprehensible.

The Theatre, Royal Tombs and the Colonnaded Street are the significant structures.

Tombs throughout Petra feature steps carved above the tombs. These steps provide a way for the deceased to assist them get to heaven via the steps to heaven. The steps are always on top of the tomb. The rest of the structure is buried under the ground, sometimes up to 20 metres below.

**BOOK & MOVIE FACT:** The Neverending Story is a magical story, a book that was made into a film, about Bastian, who rides a dragon, Falkor, as they attempt to prevent "The Nothing", a darkness that destroys everything, from enveloping the world. An allegory for our times?

**MUSIC FACT:** Led Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven is both revered and reviled due to its significance in the myth that surrounds Led Zeppelin's prominence as rock gods and the song's overexposure. In Mike Myers' film Wayne's World, a musical instrument shop has a sign on the wall in the guitar section that states, "No Stairway", to potential guitar buyers who want to test the guitars.





## The Case of the Cooking Class and the International Tabbouleh Incident (Cont.)

You think we sit around eating all the time. Alright, you have a point there. Here's proof that we also cook and we eat what we cook. Alright, it was on this one night only and we had the help of professional chefs and pre-prepared ingredients, such as the bread dough, which had to be prepared earlier anyway. We walked a lot during our visit to Petra. We've earned our dinner.

We shared food preparation with people from Singapore, Italy and France and a good fattoush salad was had by all. Food is a common language. The best part was that we ate what we all made. I will add that it tasted amazing.

Then the trouble started. Not straight away. It was after the class had finished and I asked if we could take some of the salads with us to our hotel. The chef kindly asked how much and what salads we would like. All good...and then the incident of the tabbouleh happened. As we passed through the security point to get into the hotel, oh, yes, everyone and every package is checked all the time, the security guard asked if the package contained food. "Yes" was my answer. He replied, "No". I said "Please". He smiled and shook his head. Cannot do. He asked his supervisor who, after more yes and no questions and answers, called the food and beverage manager. He said, "No, no, no". I said, "Yes, yes, yes." Due to health regulations, food prepared outside the hotel can't be brought in. If a guest becomes ill as a result, then the health authorities will investigate the hotel. A similar sign was posted at our Dead Sea accommodation. Fair enough. They can't control health and hygiene outside the hotel. In the end, everyone was apologising to everyone else. Good to know they are serious about their guest's well being.

Without us asking, the food and beverage manager offered to send up some food from the hotel's kitchen on their account as compensation. It was unnecessary but most generous. That's how we nearly caused an international security incident centered on tabbouleh and a fattoush salad, the last thing you want in this part of the world.





