



 *Classical Movements*

ORCHESTRA, CHOIR
AND BAND TOURS TO:

**The Sultanate of
Oman**





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Travel Specialists for Music and Performing Groups

WHY THE SULTANATE OF OMAN WITH CLASSICAL MOVEMENTS

The Sultanate of Oman—One of the oldest states on the Arabian Peninsula, Oman was once an important sultanate whose influence was felt as far away as Zanzibar and Pakistan (it sent an ambassador to the U.S. in the 19th century). Today its people reflect a mixture of African, Indian and Arabian influences. Its customs are shaped by those cultures, overlaid by a very thin veneer of British practices (the British were dominant in the area from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries). Long isolated from the rest of the world, Oman only recently began welcoming travelers inside its borders. But even as it has opened its doors to the world and brought modern improvements to the remotest villages, it has also retained many of its traditional desert ways. Along the coast, boat builders in small fishing villages still craft dhows by hand. Inland, Bedouins carve out their living on rocky terraces, their villages perched on the precipices of a yawning gorge. Oman doesn't boast the extraordinary oil wealth of its neighbor, the United Arab Emirates, but the standard of living is still much higher in Oman than in many other Arab countries. Roads, electricity, water, health clinics and schools have arrived in even the most remote mountain villages. The economy remains among the best managed in the region.

Muscat—Oman's capital, Muscat, lies on the Gulf of Oman coast. It is not one city but rather a combination of three urban areas and a number of districts strewn over 80 sq mi/130 sq km. Because of the hills scattered throughout the area, the three towns have remained distinct entities. The chief city, sometimes called **Old Muscat**, is set on a beautiful, crescent-shaped bay. Behind Muscat, jagged mountains form a lovely, although stark, backdrop. The Old Town area, known as Mutrah, is a small port enclave with forts perched on hilltops, narrow streets and a lovely souk, or bazaar, where traders offer myriad goods, from fabrics to jewelry, spices, old guns and other weapons. Oman's ruler, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, has an "office" palace at Mutrah, surrounded by buildings of the royal court and other government structures. The palace where he resides is located farther along the coast. Muscat is distinguished by many mosques, including the **Grand Mosque**. Built by the sultan and named for him, it is a marvelous building set on extensive grounds with lovely trees and flowers and a glorious marble courtyard. The enormous interior contains a one-piece prayer mat; huge chandeliers; and intricate, delicate and colorful inlay work on the walls and ceiling. For visitors who want to learn more about the history of Oman, the exhibition at the Armed Forces Museum in Muscat presents it in fascinating detail. Note that most museums are not open on Thursday, and mosques are closed to non-Muslim visitors after 11 am on Friday.

Despite the boom, development in Muscat is strictly controlled, with no tall buildings dominating the skyline. Buildings are constructed to ensure harmony with heritage attractions. A new opera house has recently been opened, and upgrades are well under way at the international airport, which is located quite close to the city. Be sure to see **Alam Palace, Zawawi Mosque** and the **Portuguese-built forts** of **Mirani** and **Jalai** (only the exteriors of Jalai can be viewed). **Bait Al Zubair Museum**, near the harbor, is the capital's best one-stop introduction to Omani history, customs, arts and craftwork. The Matrah fort is still in use and is closed to the public. Be sure to walk along the **Corniche**, and at its eastern end, climb the watchtower for a nice view.



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Ruwi is the only inland district of the capital area. The commercial headquarters of the nation, Ruwi is the focus of most business trips to the capital. It has a nice strip of stalls and shops along its modern main street. Attractions include the **National Museum** and the **Sultan's Armed Forces Museum** (inside the Bait al-Falaj fort), which offers an overview of Oman's military history. Continuing west along the coast, you'll soon find yourself in the residential area known as Madinat Qaboos, home to the Oman Museum and the interesting Natural History Museum. Farther west, en route to the airport, is the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. Morning tours are open to all, Muslim or not.

Southwest of Muscat on the road to Sur is the fertile **Wadi Daiqah Gorge**, one of the few wadis, or river valleys, that has water year-round. This scenic spot is a great place for a picnic. Along the east side of the city, the road connecting the Al Bustan Hotel and the Muscat Dive Center offers spectacular, other-planetary scenery and amazing coastal views. If you take a taxi tour of the city, be sure to have your driver take you down this stretch of road.

Salalah-Thanks to its location on the shores of the Indian Ocean, Oman's largest southern city benefits from the monsoons in June and July, which turn the dry landscape into a lush green expanse of rivers and thick vegetation. The summer temperatures are cooler than in much of the country, so Salalah has become a popular tourist area during the northern hot season (April-October). It's also very pleasant during the cooler winter season. The main attractions of the town itself are things associated with a seaside resort: beaches, watersports, luxury hotels and excellent seafood restaurants. Surrounded by plains of frankincense trees, Salalah also has a great incense market. Several archaeological digs have unearthed old civilizations in the area, and the drive to **Job's Tomb** (Nabi Ayoub) on a hilltop just outside town is beautiful. The city also has a gold souk and a small exhibition space of pre-Islamic artifacts, the **Dhofar Museum**. We recommend using Salalah as a base city to see the surrounding mountains, the ruins of forts at Mirabat and Taqa, and the striking ruins of the ancient city of Sumhurrat at Khor Rori.

Nizwa- Only a short drive into the interior from Masqat, Nizwa is interesting for its 17th-century fort and watchtower, and its souk, which specializes in daggers, silver and brass items. Also worth seeing is the falaj, the well-preserved irrigation system. Nearby are the interesting traditional villages of Hamra, Misfah and Bahla (a walled city known for its pottery). Allow at least half a day for an excursion to Nizwa (a full day if you visit Hamra, Misfah and Bahla). Also nearby is Birkit al-Mawz, a picturesque village located beneath a cliff, whose lines of sedimentary rocks arch like a rainbow over the town.

PERFORMANCES AND CULTURAL IMMERSION

Venues include **concert halls, culture and art centers, museums, university halls**, and others.

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Classical Movements starting traveling to the Middle East in 1994, first with its brochure program under Blue Heart Tours with over 50 different trips and in recent years to mainly countries like The Sultanate of Oman, Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Jordan for the **National Symphony Orchestra, Collegiate Chorale, Yale Symphony Orchestra, Yale Alumni Chorus, George Washington University, Yale Glee Club** and the **Yale Institute of Music**.



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Many of the countries in the Middle East have been issued Travel Warnings by the State Department. Travel Warnings are issued when long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable lead the State Department to recommend that Americans avoid or consider the risk of travel to that country. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of its staff. Please contact Classical Movements for up to date information on travel to this region and specific countries.

TESTIMONIALS

James Undercofler, President [Philadelphia Orchestra]

"Through these many visits, we have developed rich friendships with many wonderful people, who share our belief that the transformational power of music bridges cultural differences and brings people together."

Jeffrey Smith, Music Director [Philadelphia Boys Choir and Chorale]

"As always, Classical Movements created a fantastic tour for our choir. We were booked in excellent venues with great audiences, and the boys were exposed to some amazing culture experience. Having worked with the top professional musical ensembles in the world, the staff members of Classical Movements care a great deal about the logistics of performing, and they never miss a beat."

Bill Weber [Yale Alumni Chorus]

"Just a note to say what a terrific job I think you did on the recent YAC tour. Quiet, unassuming, dependable, thorough and consistently effective. All of that and a real pleasure to deal with, too. Congratulations and thank you for all that you did to make the tour such a success. It was a real pleasure to meet you."

Judy Brophy [Choral Arts Society of Washington]

"The best tour agents in the world."

Bill Pollard [North Carolina]

"Guides were exceptional! Every request was noted and done! Can't express or say how wonderful the people were. Of all trips I have taken, I have never received better value, more courteous guides or more concern for my wishes – why not have a longer tour – too short."

Eric Conway, Music Director [Morgan State University]

"Thank you for Classical Movements' attention to making this tour so memorable... I would definitely use Classical Movements again! Thank you for your part in making this tour so very successful!"

Timothy Lynch, Production Manager [Dallas Symphony Orchestra]

"The great thing about Classical Movements is that they seem to be one step ahead of the unexpected. It's difficult to think of how they could have been more prepared.... Hats off to Classical Movements."



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PRESS

A Limited Selection

“Classical Movements founder Neeta Helms delivers musicians and singers all over the world with the precision of a Steinway piano tuner.”

The Washington Post, Tom Heath, September 15, 2013

“Classical Movements is a premiere concert touring company.”

Maryland Gazette, Cara Hedgepeth, June 26, 2013

“A life-changing cultural, social and educational opportunity to travel to another country.”

The Washington Informer, Gale Horton Gay, April 24, 2013

“Classical Movements is the go-to company for ensembles planning concert tours. The firm's who's-who list of clients includes the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Morgan State University Choir and National Symphony Orchestra, not to mention the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and Vienna Philharmonic.”

Baltimore Sun, Tim Smith, June 29, 2012

“Classical Movements is based in Alexandria but works mainly overseas, arranging tours by American orchestras and choruses and running music festivals in [all over the world].

‘In the process of taking American groups around the world, we have had so many exchanges and collaborations, and we’ve had a great number of groups that wanted to come to the States,’ Helms says. ‘Choral music is becoming so international,’ Helms says. ‘There was a time when it was all Handel, Bach, Mozart and such. But now there are so many fantastic composers. And in the course of their tours, so many American groups have started learning Maori, Chinese, South African and Brazilian songs.’”

The Washington Post, Mark Jenkins June 22, 2011

“The Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra visit involved a human element that transcended the usual business of arranging orchestra tours for Neeta Helms, executive vice president of Classical Movements.

She (Helms) ushered the musicians from their first nerve-wracking security checks at New York’s JFK Airport to their last tourist stop at Rockefeller Center on the way out of the country. “It was very hard to say goodbye. Usually when a tour ends we say, ‘See you next time.’ That’s not true in this case,” she says.

Symphony Magazine, Rebecca Winzenried, March – April 2004

“...raucously enthusiastic audiences, packed houses, rave reviews, radio broadcasts, and extended ovations...”

Peabody News, Norman Scribner Leads the Washington Choral Arts in France, September/October 1996